



Building a Tolerant and Friendly Community Area Based on Religious Moderation in East Java

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Abstract:

This study examines efforts to build a tolerant and friendly community area based on religious moderation in East Java. The background of the problem includes the high religious diversity in the province, which often leads to conflicts and social tensions. The research method uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentary studies. This study aims to argue that building a tolerant and friendly community area based on religious moderation is crucial as an effort to create an inclusive environment that supports tolerance, interfaith dialogue, education, and active participation of the multicultural society of East Java. After establishing such an area, it is hoped that the community can achieve openness, appreciation of differences, peaceful religious living, increased awareness of religious moderation, formation of strong social networks, and positive influence on the younger generation. The ultimate result can create an area known as a tolerant and safe place, thus attracting investment and tourism hubs in East Java.

Keyword: *Community Area, Tolerant, Religious Moderation, East Java*

Abstrak:

Studi ini mengkaji upaya membangun kawasan masyarakat toleran dan ramah moderasi beragama di Jawa Timur. Latar belakang masalah meliputi keragaman agama yang tinggi di provinsi tersebut, yang sering kali menyebabkan konflik dan ketegangan sosial. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi. Penelitian ini ingin mengajukan argument bahwa membangun kawasan masyarakat toleran dan ramah moderasi beragama sangat krusial sebagai upaya menciptakan lingkungan inklusif yang mendukung toleransi, dialog antaragama, pendidikan, dan partisipasi aktif masyarakat Jawa Timur yang multikultural. Setelah membangun kawasan tersebut, diharapkan masyarakat dapat mencapai keterbukaan, penghargaan terhadap perbedaan, hidup beragama secara damai, meningkatkan kesadaran akan moderasi beragama, membentuk jaringan sosial yang kuat, dan memberikan pengaruh positif pada generasi muda. Hasil akhirnya dapat menciptakan kawasan yang dikenal sebagai tempat toleran dan aman sehingga menarik investasi dan simpul-simpul pariwisata di Jawa Timur.

Kata Kunci: *Kawasan Masyarakat, Toleran, Moderasi Beragama, Jawa Timur*

Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a significantly large population. By 2019, the population of Indonesia had reached 269 million people spread across various islands throughout the archipelago. As a nation of vast size, Indonesia boasts the most diverse population in the world, encompassing various ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions, and customs unified within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the key adhesive. This diversity has been successfully maintained for over 200 years of Dutch colonization. However, after Indonesia gained independence, this diversity began to face various problems, especially in the form of conflicts between ethnic groups and religions that often emerge in national news coverage. Regional sentiments that reinforce majority and minority thinking become one of the causes, resulting in the disruption of the unity thread that has persisted for centuries. Even approaching Indonesia's 100 years of independence, this issue should have been resolved. Another significant issue is the increasing incidence of intolerant behavior in various regions and the growth of intolerant groups that threaten national unity. These groups tend to create a "single identity," flattening existing differences, which contradicts the reality of Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity (Sair, 2019).

One area that is highlighted in these efforts is East Java, a province rich in history, culture, and ethnic diversity. As one of the most populous provinces in Indonesia, East Java presents social dynamics that require serious attention to building a community area that is not only tolerant of differences but also friendly to moderation in religion. In some situations, we witness clashes between religious views and local cultural rituals, such as sea offerings, cultural festivals, or other cultural rituals. Rejection of the construction of places of worship in an area, even when the conditions and requirements have met standards, also triggers tensions in society. Exclusive attitudes that reject public officials based on religious differences, from local to national levels, are increasingly becoming acute issues. Furthermore, calls in the name of religion to excommunicate fellow believers and to use violence as a form of struggle are growing stronger. To address these issues, there is a need for religious moderation. Religious moderation is important to emphasize justice, balance, and adherence to the constitution as a common agreement. Religious moderation is the key to achieving a balance between religious freedom and national commitment. Religious moderation is not an attempt to undermine faith or disregard religious values. On the contrary, religious moderation demands piety, upholding moral values and the essence of religious teachings, and fostering a sense of patriotism, tolerance, and anti-violence attitudes (Fatkurrahman, 2020).

Therefore, it is important for the government to understand and study the views of local communities that have moderate attitudes in maintaining unity and unity. The presence of tolerant and moderate communities like this can serve as a guide for building a society that cherishes peace.

Based on population data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in East Java Province as of 2023, the Muslim population reached 41,416,407 individuals, indicating an increase of 266,433 individuals compared to the 2022 figure of 41,149,974 individuals. This increase signifies growth in the number of Islamic adherents in the province. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) data records that the proportion of the Muslim population in East Java reached 100 percent of the total population in 2022, amounting to 40.35 million individuals. This indicates the dominance of Islam as the majority religion in East Java Province. In terms of religious structure, the Muslim population dominates with a proportion of 99.58 percent. Despite its high proportion, there are minorities of other religions, such as Protestantism (1.68%), Catholicism (0.68%), Hinduism (0.26%), Buddhism (0.17%), Confucianism (0.01%), and other religions (0.01%). Although predominantly Muslim, East Java Province still exhibits religious diversity with adherents of other religions. This reflects tolerance and religious pluralism in East Javanese society (Agus Dwi, 2023).

Based on the above data, it can be observed that East Java Province has made progress in terms of religion. Due to this diversity, it is necessary to promote harmony among religious communities. This includes fostering tolerance, reflecting mutual understanding, comprehension, and openness in the context of brotherhood. However, over time, conditions of religious diversity, particularly in East Java Province, have witnessed instances of intolerance among some of its communities. This occurs due to several factors, including (Kusuma, 2022):

Political interests: Political motives are often exploited to manipulate and capitalize on religious issues. Politics can utilize religion as a tool to achieve specific political goals. Such political conditions can lead to instability and chaos, negatively impacting interfaith relations. Exploiting religion for political interests can trigger conflicts and undermine the harmony among religious communities that have been painstakingly built since ancient times. For instance, using religious issues to create division or garner political support from certain religious groups.

Fanaticism: In various religions, exclusive interpretations of religion sometimes develop, where adherents believe that only their understanding or teachings of religion are correct. This can result in excessive fanaticism. Those with exclusive understandings tend to reject or belittle adherents of other religions, considering their teachings as the sole truth and regarding those who do not follow these teachings as misguided. Such fanaticism can lead to conflicts, misunderstanding, and disharmony in diverse religious communities. This fanaticism can provoke extreme behavior and intolerance among religious communities.

Therefore, due to the aforementioned issues, the government needs to establish a tolerant and moderation-friendly religious community area to realize a tolerant and peace-loving society.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through literature review and content analysis. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand complex social phenomena, such as religious moderation and the dynamics of religious diversity in East Java Province (Patton, 1987). Literature review was conducted by investigating relevant sources including scholarly journals, books, government reports, and other official documents related to the research topic. Information from various sources was utilized to comprehend the concept of religious moderation, the religious context in Indonesia, and factors influencing religious tolerance and moderation practices in East Java society.

Content analysis was performed on various documents and publications related to the religious conditions and moderation practices in East Java Province. Data collected from literature review and content analysis were then critically analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and findings relevant to the research objectives.

Moreover, this qualitative approach also allows researchers to conduct in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders such as religious leaders, academics, community activists, and local community leaders in East Java Province. These interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into the practices of religious moderation, challenges faced, and strategies employed in promoting religious tolerance in the region. By combining literature review, content analysis, and in-depth interviews, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of efforts to build a tolerant and moderation-friendly religious community area in East Java Province.

Result and Discussion

1. Concept of Religious Moderation

Moderate Islam, also known as *Wasatiyyah* Islam, originates from the words "*Islam*" and "*Wasatiyyah*." Islam, as the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad, is known as a blessed religion and is the majority religion in Indonesia with the largest population in the world today. The term moderation in Arabic is interpreted as being in the middle between two extremes or with justice. Then the word "*wasathan*" can be interpreted as being in the middle or standard. Wasatiyyah is also equated with "*al-igtishad*" with the subject "*al-muqtashid*." *Applicatively*, "*wasatiyyah*" is more often used to indicate a comprehensive mindset, especially in the context of religious attitudes in Islam (Hamdi, 2013). However, in practice, the manifestation of moderation in Islam can be categorized into four areas of discussion, namely moderation in creed, worship, behavior and manners, and the formation of sharia. According to Quraish Shihab's viewpoint, he emphasizes three important pillars in moderation, namely justice, balance, and tolerance. Justice includes equality in rights, placing something in its proper place, and providing rights moderately. Balance is found in diverse groups but heading towards one goal with certain conditions and degrees fulfilled by each part.

Islamic teachings convey that among humans there will inevitably be differences, including in culture, ethnicity, tribe, and belief. All these differences are considered as part of the fitrah and sunnatullah, or God's decree, with the main purpose being for them to get to know each other and interact. Diversity in practice is an unavoidable reality. Therefore, religious moderation exists with the goal of binding similarities. There are several reasons why religious moderation is very important, including (Akhmadi, 2019):

- a. Religious moderation becomes a necessary cultural strategy to nurture Indonesianness. As a multicultural country, the consensus in nationhood, statehood, and religion has been successfully inherited by the nation's founders, namely Pancasila in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The fact shows that Pancasila has successfully united all religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups in Indonesia. Although Indonesia is not a religion-based country, religious values still guide daily life and cannot be separated. Religious values are combined with local wisdom, and even some religious laws are regulated by the state through the Constitution and Government Regulations.
- b. The presence of religion in human life aims to maintain human dignity as noble creatures and to ensure their survival. Therefore, every religion brings a mission of peace and salvation. Religion teaches balance in various aspects of life, including prioritizing human life. Taking one life is considered equivalent to taking the lives of all humanity. Therefore, religious moderation is considered a way to restore religious practices to be in line with their essence, so that religion truly becomes the spirit in life and human dignity is preserved.
- c. Along with the development of time, the number and diversity of humans are increasing, both in terms of ethnicity, skin color, and nationality. Knowledge is also continually evolving to address humanitarian challenges. Religious texts become more open to various interpretations, and truth becomes relative. Some religious adherents even no longer adhere firmly to the essence of their religious teachings, resulting in fanaticism towards the version of truth they prefer. Therefore, conflicts that cannot be avoided occur. The complexity of human and religious life issues occurs not only in one region or country, but also in various parts of the world. To find the best solution to address this issue, the application of religious moderation becomes an important solution to prevent conflicts with religious backgrounds and to preserve human existence.

Therefore, religious moderation is considered an important cultural strategy to nurture Indonesianness and diversity. Furthermore, within the realm of Islamic legal thought in Indonesia, the concept of Islamic moderation itself has approximately five distinctive characteristics, including:

Firstly, emphasizing ideology without violence in conveying Islamic teachings. *Secondly*, adopting a modern lifestyle and all its derivatives, including science and

technology, democracy, human rights, and the like. *Thirdly*, using rational thinking in approaching and understanding the principles of Islam. *Fourthly*, applying a contextual approach in understanding the sources of Islamic teachings. *Fifthly*, implementing *ijtihad* in establishing Islamic law (*istinbat*).

However, these five characteristics can be interpreted as tolerance, harmony, and cooperation among different religious groups. Moderation in Islamic teachings, in line with the mission of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*, requires an anti-violence attitude in society's behavior, understanding of possible differences, emphasis on contextualization in interpreting divine verses, application of *istinbat* to adjust laws with the development of time, and utilization of science and technology to address the dynamics of issues in Indonesian society. Differences of opinion should be a dynamic aspect of social life, contributing to the formation of a civilized society. Moderate Islam plays a role as the guardian and guardian of the consistency of Islamic teachings introduced by the Prophet Muhammad. To restore the true face (image) of Islam, moderation is needed so that followers of other religions can feel the truth of Islamic teachings as *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019).

2. The Concept of Tolerance in the Islamic Perspective

In the scope of Islamic religion, the term tolerance is often referred to as *tasamuh*. *Tasamuh* is an action to mutually respect and not exceed boundaries, especially in the context of faith (*aqidah*). In Islamic teachings, tolerance applies not only to fellow human beings but also to the universe, animals, and the environment. With the meaning of tolerance covering such wide-ranging aspects, interreligious tolerance in Islam is considered a very important aspect and receives serious attention. This is because religious tolerance is related to the existence of human belief in Allah SWT, which is sensitive, primordial, and can trigger conflicts that attract great attention within the scope of Islam (Esposito, 2005). Then, doctrinally, Islam requires full tolerance. Islam, which is interpreted as “safe,” “peaceful,” and “submission,” is often formulated as “the religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*” (the religion that becomes a mercy for the whole world). This concept indicates that Islam comes not to abolish existing religions, but to open up spaces for discussion, dialogue, and tolerance with the spirit of mutual respect. Clearly, Islam acknowledges that diversity of beliefs and religions among human beings is the will of Allah, and therefore cannot be equated or unified.

3. Building a Region of Tolerant and Moderately Religious Friendly Communities

The region of religious moderation is a specific geographical area or social environment that actively applies and promotes moderate values in the context of religion. This area is designed to create an atmosphere that is inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious among various religious communities and beliefs. The principles of

religious moderation are implemented within it with the aim of reducing religious conflicts, building understanding among religious communities, and fostering positive cooperation. The characteristics of the region of religious moderation are as follows (Umar, 2021):

- a. **Interreligious Tolerance**
This area is known for its high level of tolerance for differences in beliefs and religious practices. Its people respect and accept religious diversity as an integral part of daily life.
- b. **Dialogue and Interaction Among Religious Communities**
This region supports the creation of positive dialogue and interaction among religious communities. This may involve activities such as discussions, seminars, interfaith meetings, and joint projects to promote mutual understanding.
- c. **Religious Education and Awareness**
There are education and awareness programs on religion that teach the values of moderation, tolerance, and mutual understanding. This may include school curricula, seminars, and community outreach campaigns.
- d. **Inclusive Religious Facilities**
This area provides inclusive religious facilities, ensuring that all religious communities have adequate places and access to perform their worship.
- e. **Active Community Participation**
Communities in this area are encouraged to actively participate in activities that promote religious moderation. This may include social activities, charitable activities, and joint development projects.

To reduce conflicts among religious communities and enhance social harmony, the government needs to build regions that are tolerant and friendly towards religious moderation. Efforts that can be made include (Huriani et.al, 2021):

Table 1. *Program To Strengthen Tolerant And Friendly Areas*

No	Aspect	Description
1.	Education and Awareness	a. Organizing education and awareness programs on tolerance, diversity, and religious moderation in schools and educational institutions. b. Incorporating materials that promote the values of tolerance and religious moderation into the educational curriculum.
2.	Interreligious Dialogue	a. Holding interreligious dialogue forums to facilitate mutual understanding and the formation of brotherhood among religious communities.

		b. Encouraging active participation of religious leaders, scholars, and the community in dialogue activities to alleviate tension and promote understanding.
3.	Training and Workshops	a. Conducting training and workshops on tolerance and religious moderation for community leaders, religious figures, and young people. b. Teaching effective communication skills and dialogue abilities to manage differences effectively.
4.	Promotion of Inclusive Culture	a. Encouraging art performances and cultural activities that reflect the diversity of society. b. Supporting cultural initiatives that celebrate differences and foster a spirit of inclusivity.
5.	Ethical Media	a. Encouraging mass media to play a positive role in shaping public opinion that supports tolerance and religious moderation. b. Ensuring balanced and ethical reporting to avoid potential polarization.
6.	Public Policy	a. Encouraging the government to formulate and implement policies that support diversity and tolerance. b. Ensuring legal protection for citizens from all walks of life regardless of their religious background or beliefs.
7.	Community Participation	a. Promoting active community participation in programs that promote tolerance and religious moderation. b. Supporting and empowering civil society organizations that play a role in raising awareness of the importance of diversity.
8.	Network Building and Collaboration	Building networks and collaborations among institutions, religious organizations, and community groups to support each other in promoting tolerance.
9.	Monitoring and Evaluation	a. Conducting regular monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of tolerance and religious moderation programs implemented.

		b. b. Identifying areas that need improvement and continuous enhancement.
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After making efforts in developing the Moderation Area for Religion, society naturally expects positive impacts from this area for the community. One of them is the awareness and attitude of respecting the plurality of society (Rohman, 2021). This understanding emphasizes the importance of respecting and acknowledging the diversity of religious beliefs in the society of East Java. From the perspective of the theory of religious pluralism, religious diversity is not a source of conflict but, on the contrary, a wealth that must be preserved and respected. Thus, the Moderation Area for Religion is expected to be a space for practices that promote religious pluralism, where every individual and religious group feels valued and recognized. Such a condition in society is a historical mandate that must be preserved, as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad in building the pluralistic society of Medina.

A tolerant society emphasizes the importance of creating good communication and understanding among religious communities through open and constructive dialogue. Through interfaith dialogue, stereotypes and negative prejudices can be minimized, and society can build more harmonious and supportive relationships. Thus, the Moderation Area for Religion is expected to be a place where interfaith dialogue is initiated and practiced regularly to strengthen tolerance and harmony among religious communities.

Even more importantly, a friendly area will have implications for social welfare, which is also relevant in this context. The theory of social welfare emphasizes the importance of considering the welfare of society as a whole, including spiritual and emotional well-being. With the existence of the Moderation Area for Religion promoting the values of moderation, tolerance, and harmony, it is hoped that an environment supporting broader social welfare for the people of East Java will be created. This can be reflected in an improvement in quality of life, a reduction in stress and conflict, and an increase in feelings of peace and happiness among the people.

By reinforcing society's expectations of the Moderation Area for Religion with this theoretical perspective, it can be understood that the development of this area is not only aimed at creating a more inclusive and tolerant environment in practice but also aligns with theoretical principles advocating the importance of pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and social welfare for the society as a whole, especially in the context of the multiculturalism of East Java. Community expectations from these zones are multifaceted:

Table 2. *Community expectation in the Moderate Area*

Aspect	Community expectation
Openness and Respect for Differences	Communities anticipate increased acceptance of diverse beliefs, cultures, and ethnicities, fostering an environment of respect and appreciation for diversity.
Peaceful Religious Life	The reduction of interfaith conflicts and the assurance of security enable communities to practice their faith without fear of discrimination or intolerance.
Awareness of Religious Moderation	Enhanced community awareness of religious moderation fosters a shift towards more moderate and tolerant attitudes and behaviors.
Formation of Social Networks	Strong social networks among religious communities promote collaboration and support, facilitating cooperative efforts towards common goals.
Education and Community Awareness	Improved understanding of religious moderation principles and continuous education initiatives contribute to heightened community awareness.
Active Community Participation	Increased involvement in activities promoting tolerance and moderation results in the formation of proactive community groups dedicated to peace-building.
Positive Influence on the Youth	Empowering the younger generation with inclusive and tolerant perspectives ensures they become agents of positive change.
Enhancement of the Area's Image	A reputation for tolerance and diversity enhances the area's attractiveness for investment and tourism.
Provision of Inclusive Religious Services	Accessible and inclusive religious facilities cater to the needs of all community members, promoting inclusivity and cohesion.

The establishment of Moderation in Religion Zones aims to foster inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious environments among diverse religious communities. Key characteristics include promoting tolerance, facilitating interfaith dialogue, providing religious education, ensuring inclusive religious facilities, and encouraging active community participation. By addressing these expectations and leveraging theoretical perspectives on pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and social well-being, Moderation in Religion Zones not only aims to create practical environments of inclusivity and tolerance but also aligns with theoretical principles advocating for pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and social welfare, particularly within the multicultural context of Jawa Timur.

Conclusion

In navigating religious life, the concept of religious moderation or *Wasathiyah* Islam serves as a crucial foundation, emphasizing justice, balance, and tolerance. In the context of Indonesia, religious moderation becomes key to nurturing Indonesian identity and maintaining unity amidst diversity. The importance of building tolerant and friendly areas of religious moderation lies in the effort to create an inclusive environment that supports tolerance, interfaith dialogue, education, and active community participation. After establishing these areas, the hope is that communities can achieve openness, appreciation for differences, peaceful religious coexistence, increased awareness of religious moderation, the formation of strong social networks, and positive influence on the younger generation. The outcome is expected to create regions known as tolerant, safe, and attractive places for investment and tourism.

The significance of religious moderation is not only as a cultural strategy but also as a foundation for maintaining harmony and balance in religious life, in line with the mission of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*. Thus, religious moderation is not just a concept but also a manifestation of values in action, creating an inclusive and harmonious society.

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