

THE ROLE OF CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article discusses the role of conservative religious movements in shaping religious moderation in Indonesia, particularly in the context of a pluralistic society undergoing constant social change. Amidst increasing globalization, digitalization, and the development of transnational religious thought, conservatism occupies a unique position because, on the one hand, it preserves the purity of religious teachings, but on the other hand, it can cause resistance to religious moderation programs. This study uses a literature review method to explore the concept of religious moderation, the nature of conservative movements, and their contribution to strengthening balanced religious practices. The results of the study show that conservative groups can play a positive role in religious moderation by safeguarding basic values and moral stability, as well as acting as a counterbalance between tradition and modernity. However, these groups also face challenges in the form of limited literacy on moderation, political influence, and a tendency to misunderstand moderation. This article offers several strategic solutions, such as strengthening religious dialogue, improving religious literacy, collaboration between conservative and moderate figures, reformulating the education curriculum, strengthening local cultural values, and state policy support. This study emphasizes that conservatism is not always an obstacle but can be an important partner in building constructive and sustainable religious moderation.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Conservative Movement; Conservative Strategies in Religious Moderation.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas peran gerakan keagamaan konservatif dalam membentuk moderasi beragama di Indonesia, khususnya dalam konteks masyarakat pluralistik yang mengalami perubahan sosial yang konstan. Di tengah meningkatnya globalisasi, digitalisasi, dan perkembangan pemikiran agama transnasional, konservatisme menempati posisi yang unik karena, di satu sisi, menjaga kemurnian ajaran agama, tetapi di sisi lain dapat menimbulkan resistensi terhadap program moderasi beragama. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode tinjauan literatur untuk mengeksplorasi konsep moderasi beragama, sifat gerakan konservatif, dan kontribusinya dalam memperkuat praktik keagamaan yang seimbang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kelompok konservatif dapat memainkan peran positif dalam moderasi beragama dengan menjaga nilai-nilai dasar dan stabilitas moral, serta bertindak sebagai penyeimbang antara tradisi dan modernitas. Namun, kelompok-kelompok ini juga menghadapi tantangan berupa keterbatasan literasi tentang moderasi, pengaruh politik, dan kecenderungan salah paham moderasi. Artikel ini menawarkan beberapa solusi strategis, seperti penguatan dialog beragama, peningkatan literasi beragama, kolaborasi antara tokoh konservatif dan moderat, perumusan ulang kurikulum pendidikan, penguatan nilai-nilai budaya lokal, dan dukungan kebijakan negara. Penelitian ini menekankan bahwa konservatisme tidak selalu menjadi kendala tetapi dapat menjadi mitra penting dalam membangun moderasi beragama yang konstruktif dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Moderasi Agama; Gerakan Konservatif; Strategi Konservatif dalam Moderasi Agama.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is a country with vast religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, making interfaith relations an important aspect of maintaining national stability. To nurture this diversity, the government introduced the concept of religious moderation, which is a non-extreme approach to religious beliefs and practices that allows for a balanced position in social life. Religious moderation aims to strengthen a culture of tolerance and prevent the emergence of religious-based conflicts in a pluralistic society. This idea then became national policy, primarily as an effort to reduce polarization and extremism. On the other hand, conservative religious movements are part of the reality of religious diversity in Indonesia, which has a major influence on social life. Conservative groups usually emphasize the importance of returning to the basic teachings of religion, purity of faith, and strengthening religious traditions that are considered authentic. Conservatism is not always synonymous with radicalism, but it can shape a certain perspective in understanding differences and social dynamics. Due to its tendency to preserve traditional values, conservative thinking often results in a cautious attitude towards social change and new religious discourse, including the idea of religious moderation (Nurlaili, 2024).

The development of modern communication technology has expanded the space for conservative movements to spread their religious ideas. Social media, digital da'wah platforms, and transnational networks have become effective means of spreading conservative thinking and practices to the wider community. In some cases, conservatism serves to preserve the moral identity of society, but in certain contexts it can lead to resistance to religious moderation if it is seen as contrary to the purification of teachings. This phenomenon shows that the dynamics between conservatism and moderation cannot be separated from the social context and technological developments in the era of globalization. The Indonesian government, through various religious policies and programs, seeks to strengthen religious moderation, particularly through education, outreach, and public literacy. The strengthening of religious moderation in schools, universities, and religious institutions is carried out so that the public has a balanced and tolerant understanding of religion. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is highly dependent on how religious groups, including conservative ones, respond to these policies. Some groups accept moderation as a value that is in line with the principle of *tawasuth* (the middle path), but others view moderation as a political agenda or the westernization of religious values (Arifin & Huda, 2021).

Considering these dynamics, studies on the role of conservative religious groups in shaping religious moderation are very important. These studies do not aim to judge the rightness or wrongness of conservatism, but to understand how conservative values can interact constructively with the principles of religious moderation. A comprehensive analysis is expected to provide a more objective understanding of the relationship between conservatism, tolerance, and religious practices in Indonesia. This kind of research is also important for developing public policies and religious education that are more inclusive and effective in creating a harmonious religious life.

The development of conservative religious movements in recent years has shown a growing trend, particularly among societies with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Various studies since around 2015 have explained that the strengthening of religious conservatism is a response to rapid social change, the influence of globalization, and the identity anxieties arising from the modernization of life values (Azra, 2015). In this context, religion functions not only as a belief system but also as a source of moral reference

and social identity for its adherents.

Several studies have shown that conservative religious movements play a complex role. On the one hand, these movements contribute to strengthening religious commitment, upholding moral values, and increasing discipline in religious practice (Misrawi, 2017). However, on the other hand, if conservative understanding is practiced narrowly and without context, it has the potential to foster exclusive attitudes, a lack of openness to differences, and run counter to the spirit of religious moderation.

The urgency of this research is based on the increasing challenges of religious life in a pluralistic society. Differences in religious understanding and practice, if not managed wisely, have the potential to trigger social tension and disrupt societal harmony. In this situation, conservative religious movements hold a strategic position because they play a significant role in shaping the religious perspectives and attitudes of the community (Bruinessen, 2015).

Furthermore, religious moderation is currently a key approach to maintaining national harmony and unity. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, emphasizes that religious moderation emphasizes a balance between commitment to religious teachings and tolerance of diversity. Therefore, research on conservative religious movements is important to see how conservative values can be directed to align with the principles of religious moderation, and contribute to building a harmonious and just social life (Subhan, 2018).

2. Method

This study employed a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. This method was chosen because the research focuses on the conceptual study and analysis of the role of conservative religious movements in shaping religious attitudes and their relationship to religious moderation.

The research data was obtained through a review of various relevant literature sources, such as books, national and international scientific journals, academic articles, and previous research results that discuss the themes of religious conservatism and religious moderation (Zed, 2014)

Data analysis was conducted through several stages. First, data reduction, which involves selecting and classifying information relevant to the research focus. Second, data presentation, which involves organizing research findings into thematic categories, such as the characteristics of conservative religious movements, patterns of religious attitude formation, and their contribution to strengthening or challenging religious moderation. Third, conclusion drawing, which involves in-depth interpretation to understand the relationship between the literature findings and the evolving socio-religious context.

Through this literature review method, researchers can compare expert views, identify similarities and differences in perspectives, and formulate a comprehensive understanding of the role of conservative religious movements in contemporary religious dynamics. Because this research does not involve field data collection, all data is sourced from literature reviews, thus the results emphasize conceptual analysis and strengthening the theoretical framework.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1 Definition of Religious Moderation

The term moderation in Arabic is known as al-wasathiyah. Etymologically, the word al-wasathiyah comes from the word wasath, which means "middle," "middle ground," or being in a position that does not lean to either side. The concept of wasathan is understood as being at the midpoint between two opposing

extremes, thus reflecting a fair, proportional, and moderate attitude. This meaning emphasizes the importance of maintaining behavior so as not to fall into extreme actions that can distance a person from the values and truths of religious teachings. In Arabic, moderation is often expressed through the word *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, while a person who applies this principle is called a *wasith*.

Interestingly, the word *wasit* has been adapted into Indonesian and has several meanings, such as a mediator in a problem, a peacemaker when a dispute arises, or a leader in a competition. Arabic language experts also emphasize that the basic meaning of the term refers to "everything that is good according to its place and context," thus signifying a value of balanced goodness. In addition, there is an expression in Arabic that states that the best thing is always in the middle.

This expression illustrates that virtue often arises from an attitude that does not lean to the extreme left or right. For example, generosity is a form of virtue that lies between stinginess and extravagance, while courage is an attitude that lies between fear and recklessness. Based on this explanation, moderation can be understood as the principle of balance in the way of thinking, behaving, and acting, so that a person can avoid excessive behavior and remain on a proportional path in various aspects of life ((Nur Arif As'ad, 2024). Moderation is a concept that emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance, simplicity, and fairness in various aspects of a person's actions, thoughts, and attitudes.

In a religious context, the term "religion" refers to a set of beliefs, convictions, and spiritual practices carried out by individuals or groups in their social lives. From this definition, religious moderation can be understood as a religious approach that places a person in a balanced position, without excess or leaning toward extreme views. This approach emphasizes tolerance, respect for diversity, and rejection of all forms of violence and fanaticism that can damage interfaith relations. Religious moderation also encourages people to understand religious teachings proportionally and not to use religion as a justification for discriminatory or radical actions. Abror explains that religious moderation means reducing the tendency toward violence or extremism in practicing religious teachings (Rosyidin, 2013). In the pluralistic context of Indonesia, this moderate attitude is key to maintaining harmony, creating a peaceful social life, and avoiding inter-religious conflict. The term moderation in Islam is known as *al-wasathiyah*, which means the middle path, that is, an attitude that is not excessive, not extreme, and adheres to the values of justice and balance in accordance with religious guidance (Hadi, 2024).

One of the main objectives of implementing religious moderation in Indonesia is to make it a cultural strategy in maintaining the identity of the nation's diversity and pluralism. As a country with great diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion, Indonesia needs the principles of moderation in order to maintain unity. The founders of the nation have passed down a common foundation through Pancasila, which is the basis of national life within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Although Indonesia is not a religious state, its people cannot be separated from religious values in their daily lives.

Therefore, religious moderation serves as a bridge connecting religious teachings with the local culture

and customs of the Indonesian people. Religious moderation not only prevents division but also strengthens equality, maintains harmony, and affirms that diversity is a treasure that must be preserved. Thus, religious moderation is an important principle in maintaining social cohesion amid the complexity of the nation's diversity (Dinar Bela Ayu Najma, 2021).

3.2 Understanding the Conservative Movement

The term conservative originally referred to a tendency to remain loyal and faithful to institutions, values, and cultural products that have been tested by time. This means that something is considered valuable because it has proven to be able to survive and provide stability in society (Dananjaya, 2010). In general, conservatism is understood as an attitude or action to maintain existing conditions, including customs, traditions, and values that have been around for a long time. In the context of education, the conservative paradigm developed from a philosophical basis close to essentialism and perennialism, which are schools of thought that emphasize the importance of basic values and eternal teachings. This view makes conservative education tend to be more static, less receptive to new ideas, and considered exclusive (Mu'arif, 2008).

From an ideological perspective, conservative thinking views that rules and understandings that have been accepted for generations must be preserved and should not be changed. This differs from liberal ideology, which encourages change and renewal. Conservative ideology views change as something that has the potential to disrupt a stable order. As explained in the literature on political philosophy, conservative views tend to maintain established approaches, do not demand radical change, and prefer stability (Zhar, 1997). In the context of religion and philosophy, conservative schools of thought interpret science using a harmonious and balanced approach.

Knowledge is seen as the result of a learning process (muktasabah) that comes from experience and sensory observation. In Indonesia, one of the figures who represents conservative thinking in education is Quraish Shihab. He places the Qur'an as the main foundation, then uses reason and a philosophical approach to interpret the contents of the Qur'an (Dalmak, 2015).

This school of thought also classifies knowledge into two main categories. First, wajib 'ain knowledge, which is knowledge that every individual must learn as a basis for carrying out religious obligations, such as worship procedures and basic religious knowledge. Second, wajib kifayah knowledge, which is knowledge that is learned after mastering wajib 'ain knowledge. This knowledge includes knowledge related to humanity and the universe, and is needed to improve the welfare, health, and progress of society. Examples of kifayah knowledge include medicine, acupuncture, and mathematics. One form of education in Indonesia that still maintains a conservative view to this day is pesantren education. Pesantren teach Islam comprehensively, from reading and understanding the Qur'an, studying hadith, practical worship, studying classical books, Islamic history, to mastery of the Arabic language. Pesantren's loyalty to classical learning traditions demonstrates the distinctive characteristics of conservatism in the world of education (M. Amirul Mukhlisin Al Hariri, 2024) (M. Amirul Mukhlisin Al Hariri, 2024).

3.3 The Role of Conservative Religious Movements in Religious Moderation

Conservative religious movements, which often strictly adhere to existing texts, traditions, and teachings, are usually seen as obstacles to religious moderation. However, in Indonesia, if managed properly, conservative movements can also contribute positively to strengthening religious moderation in the following ways:

1. Preserving the Authenticity of Teachings and Stability of Values

Conservative groups are responsible for protecting the authenticity of religious teachings so that they are not distorted by extreme or overly liberal interpretations. A cautious attitude towards the modernization of values serves as a counterbalance to groups that tend to be liberal in their interpretation of texts. This is in line with the explanation in the journal which states that conservatism is based on efforts to "protect, preserve, and maintain" religious teachings.

2. Becoming a Moral Guide within Moderate Limits

Although they tend to follow the text, conservative groups can be guardians of public norms because they uphold values, ethics, and social structures. These values are very important in religious moderation to maintain order and unity in society.

3. Providing a Balance between Tradition and Modernity

Religious moderation requires a "middle ground." Conservative groups present elements of tradition that can be synergized with the approaches of progressive moderate groups. If these two groups work together, they can prevent the emergence of extremism (both overly textual and overly liberal).

4. Becoming Partners in Dialogue for Deradicalization

Religious moderation does not reject tradition, but rather opposes extremism. Conservative teachings that are not radical can serve as a bridge for individuals at risk of being influenced by extremist ideologies, making it easier for them to arrive at a moderate understanding (M. Amirul Mukhlisin Al Hariri, 2024).

5. Promoting Religious Devotion in Balanced Proportions

Non-extreme conservatism can inspire religious devotion, discipline in religion, and closeness of the community to religious values, which are important elements for moderation in order to avoid total secularism (Rasina Padeni Nasution, 2022).

3.4 Conservative Strategies in Strengthening Religious Moderation

Leaders of Islamic Higher Education Institutions have released a book entitled Religious Moderation: From Indonesia to the World (2019). This book outlines several strategic steps to strengthen religious moderation in Islamic Higher Education Institutions, as follows:

1. The influence of the principle of moderation in religion is applied in all policies implemented in Islamic Higher Education Institutions, and is realized through the development of critical academic

studies that respect other views or groups. In this case, it is important to include a curriculum that covers ideological subjects as a basis for strengthening. Examples of ideological subjects can include Pancasila and Citizenship education. Thus, Islamic Higher Education Institutions can adopt policies and institutionalize civic values in their educational culture.

2. Making Islamic Religious Universities a center for the dissemination of human values, interfaith harmony, and religious moderation. This is very important considering that Islamic education is now facing serious challenges due to the development of sectarian understanding and transnational Islamic movements.

This phenomenon can be seen in Islamic religious universities through the Islamization movement brought about by a group of students through tarbiyah and cadre forums.

3. Improving religious literacy and interfaith education. In an effort to improve religious literacy, Islamic religious universities play an important role in voicing religious moderation through digital media. In this fast-paced and practical era, the way people understand religious narratives is often not objective and can lead to negative outcomes. Some people tend to be too textual in interpreting sacred verses, displaying excessive fanaticism, which leads to exclusivism, extremism, and even terrorism. There are also those who go beyond the limits in interpreting the holy book and get caught up in using God's message for personal gain. As a result, conflicts of interest can disrupt the harmony of religious life (Rofiqi, 2023).

3.5 The Challenges of Conservative Movements in Strengthening Religious Moderation

The challenge of knowledge, the existence of misunderstandings regarding the essence of religious moderation. Religious moderation is not a compromise of theological beliefs with other religious adherents, which it is called moderate.

1. The challenge of political interests (of those in power) in every religious moderation program, because this moderation gives rise to justice, brings balance, and removes oneself from unilateral interests and shared interests (congregation).
2. The challenge of a lack of literacy related to religious moderation, so that it can only be found in media that does not thoroughly examine it and from unclear sources,
3. Challenges include low public awareness of religious moderation as a way to respect and value differences in religious rituals (Hasbullah, 2024).

3.6 Solutions from the Conservative Movement in Strengthening Religious Moderation

1. Strengthening Open and Sustainable Religious Dialogue

One strategic solution to strengthen religious moderation is to create an open, honest, and continuous space for religious dialogue between conservative groups, moderate groups, and the

government. Such dialogue is important to build mutual understanding, reduce potential misunderstandings, and erode prejudices that may have developed between groups (Hidayah, 2020).

In this dialogue forum, conservative groups are given space to comprehensively express their views, concerns, and rationale. Meanwhile, other groups provide a more inclusive perspective while still respecting the principles of religious teachings. Through healthy communication, conservative groups can understand that religious moderation is not an attempt to diminish religious values, but rather an approach to creating a harmonious life in a diverse society. Thus, dialogue becomes an important means of finding common ground between traditional values and the demands of social diversity (Syafii, 2021).

2. Strengthening Comprehensive and Balanced Religious Literacy

The next solution is to improve the quality of religious literacy in a broader and deeper way. Religious literacy does not only include the ability to read religious texts, but also involves understanding the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which the teachings were passed down. Understanding this context helps individuals, especially conservative groups, see that religious teachings have a very strong dimension of humanity, peace, and justice.

With more balanced religious literacy, conservative groups can understand that religious teachings do not only contain strict rules, but also provide flexible moral guidelines for adapting to developments in society. Efforts to strengthen religious literacy can be carried out through formal education, religious studies, dai training, and the use of digital media for preaching that is more informative and dialogical (Fauzan, 2020).

3. Building Collaboration Between Conservative and Moderate Figures

The involvement of conservative figures is an important factor in the success of religious moderation because they have strong moral authority and social influence within their communities. Therefore, one very effective solution is to build cooperation or collaborative forums between conservative and moderate figures in various religious and social programs.

Through this cooperation, conservative figures do not feel excluded or marginalized, but rather invited to be part of efforts to strengthen social harmony. They can convey religious views that are deeply rooted in tradition, while learning to accept the values of tolerance and respect for diversity. This collaboration also helps convey the message of moderation more effectively to communities that tend to follow the direction of conservative figures (Zuhdi, 2019).

4. Enhancing the Role of Education and Moderate Curriculum

Education is an important means of shaping a person's view of religion and diversity. Therefore, strengthening the religious education curriculum with a balanced approach between textual and contextual understanding is a significant solution in strengthening religious moderation.

Through a good curriculum, students are taught that religious attitudes do not mean being extreme or exclusive. Conservative values such as maintaining morality, discipline, and obedience can coexist harmoniously with values of tolerance, openness, and respect for differences. Thus, conservative groups involved in education can act as agents of change in spreading the values of moderation more widely (Ningsih, 2021).

5. Integrating Conservative Values with Local Wisdom (Cultural Approach)

Another highly effective solution is to combine positive conservative values, such as maintaining ethics, traditions, and order, with more inclusive local wisdom practices. This cultural approach can make the concept of religious moderation more acceptable to the community.

Local wisdom such as the culture of mutual cooperation, deliberation, and tolerance among citizens can serve as a bridge between conservative and moderate values. This approach allows conservative groups to maintain their basic principles without being closed-minded or rejecting diversity. This integration simultaneously strengthens religious and national identity (Mulyadi, 2022).

6. The Role of the State in Providing an Inclusive Space and Fair Policies

The final solution is to ensure the presence of a fair, inclusive, and non-discriminatory state in managing religious diversity in society.

The state needs to provide a space for dialogue between groups, provide training and guidance support, and encourage cooperation between mass organizations and religious communities.

When conservative groups feel that they are given equal space, that their opinions are valued, and that they are treated fairly, they will more easily accept the concept of religious moderation. The state must also ensure that there are regulations that suppress the potential for intolerance without limiting peaceful religious expression. With the right policies, the state can become the main facilitator in creating a religious and harmonious society (Satori, 2021).

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that conservative religious movements play a significant role in shaping and strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. Conservatism remains necessary as a guardian of religious purity and moral stability, enabling it to act as a counterbalance amid increasingly diverse religious thought. However, conservative groups face various challenges, such as low literacy in moderation, misunderstandings of the concept of moderation, and complex political influences and social dynamics. If managed with the right approach, conservative groups can become important partners in the implementation of religious moderation through the strengthening of open dialogue, increasing religious literacy, cooperation between religious leaders, curriculum reform, and the integration of conservative values with local wisdom. The role of the state is also very important in creating inclusive and

fair policies so that all religious groups feel valued. With such a comprehensive strategy, religious moderation in Indonesia can be realized in a more constructive, sustainable manner that is in line with the pluralistic character of society.

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