

## Whither Kampung Sawah Bekasi: A Model For Religious Moderation Practice?

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### Abstract

This article examines the practice of religious moderation in Kampung Sawah, Bekasi, an area known for its high level of religious diversity and longstanding traditions of harmonious interfaith relations. Although the concept of *religious moderation* was formally introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs only in recent years, this study finds that the community of Kampung Sawah has long embodied similar values in their everyday social practices. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the research identifies that the four key indicators of religious moderation—national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and appreciation of local culture—are strongly reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of the community. These moderate orientations have emerged through a long socio-cultural process, shaped by value transmission within families and sustained interactions within the broader community. A central mechanism in this formation is the community's consistent emphasis on shared identity and collective harmony over religious or cultural differences. The findings demonstrate that religious moderation can evolve organically through historical experience, cultural continuity, and community-based social relations.

Keywords: *Kampung Sawah*, Religious Moderation, Tolerance, Pluralism.

### INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the discourse on religious freedom and inclusive religiosity in Indonesia has become increasingly prominent as a response to the rising cases of intolerance and violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB). West Java has been the region most frequently placed under scrutiny. Various monitoring institutions—such as the Setara Institute (2009,2014,2016), The Wahid Institute (2018), CRCS UGM (2011,2013), and the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM, 2017)—have consistently ranked this province as the area with the highest level of FORB violations in Indonesia. These findings align with analyses by scholars who emphasize that intolerance in the urban-suburban areas of Java is not solely related to religious issues, but also to the dynamics of local politics, competition over public spaces, and demographic shifts (Coser, 1957; Casram, 2016; Hoon, 2016; Faidi, 2021).

The Religious Harmony Index (KUB) during the 2015-2019 period showed a declining trend, despite a brief increase in 2016 (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). The fluctuation of this index reflects the fragility of intergroup relations within the context of modernity and urbanization. Several modern sociological theories argue that modernization processes may erode social solidarity and reinforce instrumental rationality, thereby creating space for the growth of social segregation (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000). In the Indonesian context, this condition is further exacerbated by the rise of religious conservatism and the politicization of identity (Susanto, 2019), which often generate horizontal tensions (Heryanto, 2026; Fox & Menchik, 2011).

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Previous research Nurdin & Jamaluddin (2024) indicates that religious conflict in West Java has developed in two main patterns: communal conflict and sectarian conflict. Communal conflicts tend to occur in major cities such as Bandung, Cimahi, Bekasi, Bogor, and Depok, which are characterized by heterogeneous social structures and *gesellschaft*-oriented social relations (Tönnies, 1991). Conversely, sectarian conflicts are more prevalent in regency areas with homogeneous social structures and strong communal relations, such as Garut, Tasikmalaya, Kuningan, and Cianjur (Jamaludin, 2021). These patterns demonstrate that religious conflict cannot be understood merely as a doctrinal dispute, but must also be seen as a social phenomenon influenced by societal structure, power distribution, and local political dynamics

Within this framework, Kampung Sawah in Bekasi City serves as a significant case study. As an urban area with high population mobility, Bekasi represents a space characterized by cultural faults—cultural fissures generated by the intense encounters of different groups within an urban setting (Lefebvre, 1991). Urban societies are typically marked by social relations that are individualistic, pragmatic, and interest-oriented (Durkheim, 1997), which may weaken social cohesion. Nevertheless, Kampung Sawah demonstrates a pattern of social interaction that diverges from these dominant tendencies.

Historically and culturally, Kampung Sawah possesses three key characteristics that make it an important laboratory for the study of religious moderation. First, the presence of the “golden triangle” of worship houses—Fi Sabilillah Mosque, Saint Servatius Catholic Church, and the Pasundan Christian Church—demonstrates a harmonious spatial coexistence. The shared use of a public cemetery also serves as a symbol of social integration. Second, the existence of families whose members adhere to different religions—Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism—reflects an organic form of pluralism, in line with the ideas of Hick (1989) and Eck (2001), who emphasize the significance of intimate encounters in shaping substantive tolerance. Third, the preservation of Betawi culture as an inclusive local identity illustrates how culture can function as a social glue (Geertz, 1973; Bertrand, 2008; Freiling & Fichtner, 2010). The practice of Christian/Catholic Betawi communities who continue to wear Betawi traditional attire during church ceremonies provides evidence of a harmonious integration between culture and religion (Annisa & Tabassum, 2023).

The declaration of Kampung Sawah as a “Pancasila Village” further affirms that the values of tolerance and moderation are not merely spontaneous social practices, but rather a collective commitment to preserving diversity. This concept aligns with the four indicators of religious moderation formulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019): national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local culture. However, an important question arises: to what extent are these values genuinely rooted and sustainable? Can this harmony withstand the rapid social, political, and demographic transformations?

This question is relevant because religious moderation at the local level is not always stable. Bubandt (2014) demonstrates that social harmony can be disrupted by seemingly minor changes in local political and economic contexts. Likewise, Putnam (2000) asserts that strong social capital must be continually maintained to avoid erosion due to social fragmentation. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of religious moderation in Kampung Sawah is not only crucial for capturing local achievements, but also for assessing potential vulnerabilities.

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, literature review, and documentation. The data were analyzed through categorization, triangulation, and interpretation processes to produce a comprehensive

understanding of religious moderation practices in Kampung Sawah. Thus, this research contributes to the literature on religious moderation, pluralism, and socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia, while enriching international studies on coexistence and social harmony in multireligious societies.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Kampung Sawah: A Religious Pluralistic Society**

Unlike the general characteristics of rural communities that tend to be religiously homogeneous, Kampung Sawah is widely recognized as a plural village inhabited by Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants. The presence of these interfaith communities has a long historical trajectory that cannot be separated from conflict dynamics (Mahfudz, 2025). Around 1896, Christianity began to grow in this area through missionary activities and open baptisms among local residents. The resistance of segments of the Muslim community triggered social tensions, leading to violent incidents such as the burning of churches between 1902 and 1917, which forced several Christian residents to flee to other regions (Interview, Religious Leader, July 15, 2024).

These dynamics demonstrate that interreligious relations were initially marked by suspicion and domination, making conflict an unavoidable phase in the process of social transformation. Nevertheless, this conflictual situation became part of the social dialectic, as argued by Dahrendorf (1959), who asserts that every society experiences tension between conflict and integration as two interrelated elements. Conflict constitutes a component of change that can ultimately lead to the creation of new consensus or social integration.

Following this period of conflict, the community of Kampung Sawah gradually developed a new and more harmonious form of social relations. Today, symbols of integration are visible in the presence of mosques and churches standing side by side, as well as in various social activities involving residents of different religious affiliations, such as reciprocal visits, neighborhood security initiatives, and cooperation in communal events (Interview, Traditional Leader, July 13, 2024).

This phenomenon of integration aligns with Setiadi's (2018) typology of social integration, which includes: (1) family integration—families consisting of members with different religions; (2) kinship integration—brotherhood and kinship ties that persist despite religious differences; (3) associative integration—ongoing social cooperation for shared interests; and (4) communal integration—peaceful coexistence within the same locality without conflict.

Collectively, these forms of integration constitute important social capital that reflects the strength of religious moderation practices in Kampung Sawah. Tolerance, mutual respect, and acceptance of differences have now become deeply rooted as shared social norms passed down across generations. Kampung Sawah shows that rural society is not always synonymous with religious homogeneity. Despite having traditional social structures and a strong kinship system, religious plurality—shaped through a historical process of conflict—has instead become the foundation for a more resilient form of social integration. This transformation from conflict to harmony illustrates that religious moderation is not merely a discursive idea, but a tangible outcome of social dialectics collectively constructed by the community.

**Practices of Religious Moderation in Kampung Sawah**

In this section, the author examines the practices of religious moderation in Kampung Sawah. The central question is whether the tolerance that emerges from the village's religious plurality reflects a strong degree of religious moderation. To assess this matter, the discussion adopts the four indicators of religious moderation established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, namely: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). These indicators serve as analytical tools to determine the extent to which religious moderation is practiced by the Kampung Sawah community.

**National Commitment**

National commitment is one of the key indicators within the concept of religious moderation developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MORA). This concept refers to a religious perspective, attitude, and behavior that demonstrate loyalty to the national consensus, particularly Pancasila as the foundation and ideology of the state (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). National commitment is understood as the community's ability to position religious identity in harmony with national identity, thereby fostering a peaceful and inclusive civic life.

In this context, the Government of Bekasi City officially designated Kampung Sawah as a "Pancasila Village" in 2016. This recognition is grounded in the national values embedded in everyday social interactions, particularly the community's capacity to maintain unity amid social and religious plurality. Pancasila, as the national philosophy, has proven its ability to unite Indonesia's ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity (Hastangka, Armawi, & Kaelan, 2019). Kampung Sawah stands as a concrete representation of that principle.

Kampung Sawah is known as a multicultural social space characterized by cultural diversity—such as Betawi, Batak, Nias, and Sundanese—as well as various religions including Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism. This diversity has made Kampung Sawah a miniature reflection of Indonesia, where differences not only exist but are lived out through shared coexistence. The community's ability to preserve such diversity forms the foundation for its identity as a Pancasila Village.

As an effort to strengthen national commitment, the residents of Kampung Sawah established the Bhineka Tunggal Ika National Forum (Fornas BTIka) of Bekasi City. This organization functions as a guardian of Pancasila values and a protector of social harmony within a plural society. The forum actively conducts national dialogue activities, youth leadership training, and the establishment of the Brotherhood and Pancasila Monument as a symbol of interfaith unity in Bekasi City.

The practice of national commitment in Kampung Sawah is not a recent invention; rather, it has long been part of the social values inherited from their ancestors. Values such as openness, inclusive social interaction, and mutual assistance have become an integral part of the community's identity (Nur, 2023). This openness plays a crucial role in preventing religious-based exclusivism and social segregation that may lead to conflict. Thus, national commitment is not merely understood as a state doctrine but is manifested in social relations built upon mutual respect across differences.

**Tolerance**

Tolerance is the second indicator of religious moderation. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), tolerance refers to attitudes that demonstrate openness, broad-mindedness, voluntarism, and respect toward others' beliefs and opinions, while maintaining coexistence with people of different backgrounds as part of a shared social life. The question that arises, then, is: how is the indicator of religious tolerance manifested by the people of Kampung Sawah?

Kampung Sawah, as described in this study, is a unique settlement—recognized as the first Betawi village where the community embraces multiple religions. Its diversity serves as a social magnet, making it a microcosm of Indonesia where interreligious harmony is nurtured through openness, tolerance, and a commitment to mutual solidarity. Several forms of tolerance can be observed in Kampung Sawah, including:

1. Pluralistic Religion.

The community of Kampung Sawah does not only practice Islam, but also Christianity and Hinduism. In fact, the Christian population is nearly equal in number to the Muslim population. Religious diversity does not exist solely at the communal level but also within families, where members may adhere to different faiths (Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism). This condition is considered normal due to its long historical formation and the strong culture of tolerance. The presence of houses of worship also reflects this balance—churches and mosques stand in comparable numbers. This diversity does not trigger ridicule or hostility; rather, it fosters mutual respect, protection, and the preservation of each other's religious life.

2. Pluralistic Administrative Governance.

Pluralism is likewise evident in the administrative structure of the Jatimurni subdistrict, where Kampung Sawah is located. The local government officials represent different religious backgrounds—including Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim civil servants. This composition is intended to maintain unity and a shared sense of representation within a religiously diverse community. In doing so, the administration reflects the heterogeneity of Kampung Sawah and reinforces interreligious harmony at the institutional level.

3. Pluralistic Family Structure.

Pluralistic families are those in which members of the same household practice different religions. Unlike common families that share one religious identity, some families in Kampung Sawah consist of a Muslim father, a Catholic mother, and Protestant children, or vice versa. These differences emerge either through interfaith marriage or religious conversion. Families and the wider community do not treat this as a problem. Religion is regarded as a personal matter, including children's right to choose their own faith. Such freedom demonstrates a high level of tolerance in Kampung Sawah, where even the most sacred personal decision—religious affiliation—is entrusted to individual autonomy and responsibility.

4. Pluralistic Religious Propagation.

Another significant feature is their approach to religious propagation. Religious preachers deliver their teachings only to followers of their respective faiths, ensuring that religious outreach does not provoke conflict. Mutual respect among religious leaders is strongly upheld. During religious celebrations, interfaith appreciation is clearly visible, and members of other religions often participate in the festivities. Even burial arrangements reflect this spirit of coexistence, as Muslims

and Christians share a common cemetery. Through such pluralistic propagation practices, unity and communal integrity are continuously preserved.

### **Anti-Violence**

Anti-violence is the third indicator of religious moderation. Living within a context of religious diversity is certainly not without challenges. Suspicion, prejudice, and assumptions that other religions are inferior or unworthy of appreciation can sometimes emerge. Therefore, to ensure Kampung Sawah remains a community free from violence, interreligious attitudes have been consciously cultivated. Instilling positive perspectives among religious adherents becomes crucial to maintaining social order, minimizing distrust, and strengthening harmony.

Developing constructive attitudes toward tolerance is essential. As expressed by an Islamic religious leader in Kampung Sawah, Rahmadin Afif (Interview, August 18, 2024), shaping a correct understanding of “tolerance” is important, as such understanding informs how individuals behave toward others. He emphasized that tolerance must be preserved, protected, and continuously developed. Afif illustrated the community using a garden metaphor: a garden is filled with many types of flowers and plants, yet it remains attractive and beautiful. Likewise in Kampung Sawah, the presence of three religions should not be viewed as a source of rivalry or hostility, but rather as a form of beauty. Diversity, like flowers of different colors, creates a harmonious and appealing social environment. Thus, maintaining positive public attitudes is vital to prevent prejudice, suspicion, and the demeaning of others.

### **Accommodation of Local Culture**

The Kampung Sawah community highly upholds local wisdom. The role of local culture cannot be overlooked, as it significantly shapes the development of religious moderation in Kampung Sawah. Many indigenous Betawi cultural traditions are practiced collectively by both Christian and Muslim residents. The integration of religious rituals and cultural traditions continues to be strengthened as a way to maintain communal harmony. In fact, the Catholic community actively embraces Betawi customs to support their religious activities. This approach is intended to connect religious practices with the local cultural context, making these activities appear not merely as religious ceremonies but also as expressions of communal cultural identity.

For instance, the Betawi tradition of *sedekah bumi* (“earth alms”) has been adopted as an annual church tradition on May 13. Historically, this tradition expressed gratitude for the rice harvest and was performed after harvest season, usually between July and August. It was originally known as *bebaritan*, a ritual to seek protection and blessings. Although the tradition disappeared for some time due to modernization, it was revived by Father Kurrus and adapted into a Catholic ritual, coinciding with the feast day of St. Servatius, as well as Christmas and Easter celebrations.

Community members enthusiastically participate each year, bringing various traditional foods such as *urap* and chicken, including offerings like *lisong*—a traditional cigarette—symbolically provided for ancestral spirits. The ritual, typically led by community elders, aims to maintain harmony and ensure prosperity. This Betawi tradition, revitalized through Christian religious practices, reveals a strong sense of cultural belonging among Christian residents. At the same time, Muslim residents feel that their cultural heritage remains respected and preserved, allowing both groups to maintain strong interreligious bonds. When such cultural events take place, all Kampung Sawah residents—Muslim and Christian alike—participate fully, recognizing these traditions as

shared heritage. As a Christian community leader stated: “The Church does not want to distance itself from our Betawi identity. Our faith grows stronger when it walks alongside our culture. By preserving Betawi customs within church events, we show that Christianity here is rooted in Kampung Sawah’s history and values.” (*Interview, Catholic Leader, June 15, 2024*). Similarly, a local cultural elder expressed the importance of safeguarding shared traditions: “Culture is what unites us. Before religious institutions existed here, the culture had already bound the community together. That is why we always say: do not let culture fade away, because once culture disappears, unity will follow.” (*Interview, Traditional Leader, June 15, 2024*)

Another example is the integration of Betawi performing arts—such as *topeng* mask dance, *wayang kulit*, traditional Betawi attire, and *tanjidor* music—within church celebrations. On May 13, 1996, during the anniversary of St. Servatius Church, the Church invited six men and six women—all native Kampung Sawah residents—to participate as cultural representatives. The male participants wore traditional Betawi clothing: black loose trousers, a white *sadariah* shirt, a red *sarong*, and a black cap adorned with the emblem of St. Servatius. Female participants wore *Pekalongan* batik, white *kebaya*, and white veils. As the event was a Catholic religious celebration, participants held St. Servatius pilgrimage staffs in their left hands. The celebration was enlivened by a *tanjidor* ensemble, symbolizing the harmonious integration of religion and culture within the Kampung Sawah community.

Another Betawi cultural tradition showcased in Kampung Sawah is the *Wayang Betawi* puppet performance. *Wayang Betawi* is one of the Betawi art forms that is nearing extinction and has become increasingly marginalized. A *Wayang Betawi* performance was held on Saturday, May 30, 2011, in the southern parking area of the St. Servatius Church. This event was attended by various community groups in Kampung Sawah. Similar to the previously mentioned cultural celebrations, this performance served as a bridge for interfaith harmony within the plural society of Kampung Sawah. In his remarks, the Head of Pondok Melati Subdistrict referred to Kampung Sawah as a “model region” for interreligious harmony. Likewise, KH. Rahmadin Afif emphasized the deeply rooted harmony in Kampung Sawah, stating that such harmony has been present “since birth.”

The most spectacular cultural preservation initiative in Kampung Sawah was the “*Ngeriung Bareng*” (Gathering Together) event held on January 1, 2009. The idea for this event originated from shared memories of Kampung Sawah’s historically harmonious and communal life. The activity involved interfaith leaders and community members from Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism, including community leader Yakobus Napiun, KH. Rahmadin Afif (Fi Sabilillah Islamic Boarding School), Father Sarto (Christian leader), Ustadz Malik, Ustadz Arifin, representatives of the Gereja Pasundan Council, Hindu religious figures, the head of the local neighborhood association (RW 02), the village leader of Jatimurni, the subdistrict head, and members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD). The event aimed to reinforce interreligious harmony within Kampung Sawah.

The gathering resulted in a collective pledge known locally as the “Four Nyok,” expressed in the Kampung Sawah variant of Betawi language:

1. Nyok (Let us) preserve the Betawi culture of Kampung Sawah.
2. Nyok (Let us) protect our village and keep it green.
3. Nyok (Let us) empower the community of Kampung Sawah to remain peaceful, prosperous, and harmonious.

4. Nyok (Let us) ensure that our people continue to live clean and healthy lives.

The integration of Betawi cultural heritage into religious life is not merely symbolic but emerges from strong communal awareness. As expressed by a local Betawi cultural leader, Yakobus Napiun, during an interview on August 18, 2024: "Our ancestors have lived here long before religious institutions were established. Culture is what binds us as a family. So whether a person is Muslim, Catholic, or Protestant, if they are from Kampung Sawah, they must love Betawi culture. Culture is our common identity." (*Interview, Yakobus Napiun, August 18, 2024*)

Similarly, a Catholic leader describes how the Church adopts local customs not merely as decoration, but as a theological approach to create closeness with the community: "Faith must live within the culture of the people. By embracing Betawi traditions—music, clothing, rituals—we show that the Church is part of this land, part of Kampung Sawah's heart." (*Interview, Father Robert Sarto, August 20, 2024*). An Islamic cleric further explains the role of adat in sustaining harmony: "Religion teaches us goodness, but culture teaches us how to live that goodness together. That is why tolerance here is strong. We protect each other's traditions just as we protect each other's faith." (*Interview, KH. Rahmadin Afif, Islamic Leader, August 25, 2024*)

## CONCLUSION

Kampung Sawah represents a notable model of religious moderation in Indonesia, where the four key indicators—national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture—have been practiced long before religious moderation became a national policy discourse. The case of Kampung Sawah demonstrates that geographic setting alone does not determine social character; although it is geographically classified as a village, its social behavior reflects characteristics commonly associated with urban communities. High levels of interreligious tolerance have been sustained through long-standing cultural processes that strengthen social cohesion, particularly within a relatively homogeneous social structure shaped by kinship ties, intermarriage, and shared lineage, fostering a strong sense of belonging and unity.

These social conditions have enabled the community to construct a harmonious social and cultural system based on shared perceptions, collective interests, and commonly upheld social norms. Through everyday interactions, these values have become deeply embedded in community life, facilitating mutual understanding and reinforcing interreligious tolerance as a lived social practice rather than a formalized policy. This case challenges assumptions that rural communities are inherently resistant to religious plurality and demonstrates that religious moderation can emerge organically from local traditions and socio-cultural values, independent of top-down state interventions (Alia & Maulana, 2023).

The findings offer important theoretical and practical implications for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. Kampung Sawah illustrates how cultural capital, kinship networks, and community-led initiatives can serve as strategic foundations for sustaining interfaith harmony and preventing conflict. As a result, this community provides a replicable model for community-based religious moderation in contexts with similar socio-cultural characteristics. Policy efforts should therefore focus on empowering local institutions, integrating local wisdom into government and educational initiatives, preserving cultural expressions that support harmony, strengthening interfaith education and youth collaboration, and adopting Kampung Sawah as a best-practice model for promoting religious moderation in multicultural and multi-faith environments across Indonesia.



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