

Globalizing Religious Moderation: Indonesia's Experience of Religious Moderation for the ASEAN and Global Contexts

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the potentials and challenges of globalizing Indonesia's policy of *religious moderation* within the ASEAN and broader international context. Amid growing polarization rooted in religion, extremism, and identity-based conflicts, the Indonesian government—through the Ministry of Religious Affairs—has developed the religious moderation policy as both a normative and strategic framework to preserve harmony within plural societies. Using a qualitative approach based on case studies and document analysis, this research draws on primary data from official reports by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and secondary data from relevant international sources. The findings indicate that Indonesia's model of religious moderation has begun to gain attention in regional and global forums, particularly through its integration into educational initiatives, interfaith dialogue platforms, and diplomatic arenas such as ICROM and KMBAAA. Nevertheless, several dysfunctions persist: resistance from ideological groups, elitist and symbolic implementation, inconsistency with ongoing domestic discrimination, and the ceremonial nature of international actor involvement. These findings underscore the urgent need for more inclusive, community-based, and consistent strategies if religious moderation is to evolve into a global value system. This study offers an original contribution by positioning Indonesia's religious moderation not merely as a domestic policy, but as a transnational normative model relevant for diplomacy and religious studies.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; ASEAN; Diplomacy; Pluralism; Islamic Radicalism.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis potensi dan tantangan globalisasi kebijakan moderasi beragama Indonesia dalam konteks ASEAN dan dunia internasional yang lebih luas. Di tengah meningkatnya polarisasi yang

berakar pada agama, ekstremisme, dan konflik berbasis identitas, pemerintah Indonesia—melalui Kementerian Agama—mengembangkan kebijakan moderasi beragama sebagai kerangka normatif sekaligus strategis untuk menjaga harmoni dalam masyarakat majemuk. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kasus dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini memanfaatkan data primer dari laporan resmi Kementerian Agama serta data sekunder dari sumber internasional yang relevan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa model moderasi beragama Indonesia mulai mendapatkan perhatian di berbagai forum regional dan global, khususnya melalui integrasinya dalam inisiatif pendidikan, platform dialog lintas agama, serta arena diplomatik seperti ICROM dan KMBAAA. Namun demikian, sejumlah disfungsi masih mengemuka: adanya resistensi dari kelompok ideologis, implementasi yang simbolik dan elitis, ketidaksesuaian dengan praktik diskriminasi domestik yang masih berlangsung, serta keterlibatan aktor internasional yang bersifat seremonial. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya strategi yang lebih inklusif, berbasis komunitas, dan konsisten agar moderasi beragama dapat berkembang menjadi sistem nilai global. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi orisinal dengan memposisikan moderasi beragama Indonesia bukan sekadar sebagai kebijakan domestik, melainkan sebagai model normatif transnasional yang relevan dalam diplomasi dan kajian keagamaan.

Kata Kunci: Moderasi Beragama; ASEAN; Diplomasi; Pluralisme; Radikalisme Islam.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the world has faced serious challenges regarding interreligious harmony and social stability due to the rise of extremism, identity polarization, and conflicts rooted in differences of belief (Ali-Fauzi, 2019; Setia & Syarif, 2022). These phenomena are not limited to the Middle East but have also emerged in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia—a country known for having the world's largest Muslim population and high levels of religious and cultural diversity. Challenges such as intolerance, hate speech based on religion, and identity-based violence have grown more complex amidst globalization, digitalization, and disinformation. Data from the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) indicates that in 2022 alone, the ASEAN region recorded 755 attacks and 415 deaths due to terrorism. Countries like Myanmar, the Philippines, and Indonesia ranked highest in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), with respective scores of 7.977, 6.328, and 5.502 (Santika, 2023). This suggests that threats to religious security and harmony remain pressing issues in a region celebrated for its pluralism.

Indonesia has experienced a quantitative decline in terrorist incidents, but the fatality rate per attack has increased. In 2022, Indonesia recorded only seven terrorist attacks—the lowest since 2014—but they resulted in 25 deaths, or an average of 3.6 deaths per attack (Salam, 2024). This marks a 56% decrease in attack frequency but a significant increase in lethality compared to the previous year, which had an average of 1.5 deaths per attack. Indonesia now ranks third in ASEAN and fourth in the Asia-Pacific in terms of the impact of terrorism (Rafli, 2024). Globally, terrorism-related deaths increased by 22% in 2023, even as the number of incidents fell by 22%, indicating that attacks are becoming more focused and deadly (BNPT RI, 2024). These facts underscore that intolerance and identity-based violence remain real and urgent challenges that require strategic responses grounded in the values of *moderation* and comprehensive policy approaches.

Indonesia has responded to this dynamic by developing the concept and policy of religious moderation through the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The goal is to balance religious expression so that it avoids extremes—either rigid conservatism or liberalism that disregards fundamental religious values. The religious moderation program has been integrated into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional*) and formalized through Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 (Junaedi, 2019). The policy encompasses education, civil servant training, digital narrative reinforcement, inter- and intra-religious cooperation, and international diplomacy. Despite the progress achieved, many still view religious moderation as a uniquely Indonesian concept that may not be applicable or relevant to other national contexts.

In the context of ASEAN and the broader world, however, the religious moderation approach holds great potential as a strategic alternative to prevent religious conflict and foster peace across nations. ASEAN member states share multicultural and multireligious characteristics with Indonesia, yet not all have formally adopted moderation principles in their national policies. Furthermore, the spread of extremism through transnational social media underscores the urgent need for regional and global cooperation. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how Indonesia's experience could serve as a replicable and relevant model for contributing to global peace agendas through religious moderation.

Previous research on religious moderation has developed through various approaches, but several key tendencies require reevaluation. First, some studies focus on conceptual development and institutional reinforcement of religious moderation within Indonesia. As'ad (2021) highlighted the role of Azharite organizations in mainstreaming *al-wasatiyah* as a form of moderation. Baba et al. (2023) analyzed how State Islamic Universities (UIN) serve as key loci for internalizing moderation in higher education environments. Ropi (2019) emphasized the dynamic relationship between the state and religious affairs management as a determinant of policy success. However, these studies are largely limited to internal analysis and rarely address intergovernmental diplomacy.

Second, a number of studies emphasize cultural dimensions and religious literacy in local contexts as foundations for moderation. Hernawan et al. (2021) explored Sundanese manuscripts as cultural heritage bearing moderation values, while Mahrus et al. (2020) identified moderate messages in classical Islamic manuscripts. Ginting (2021) examined how Muhammadiyah communities promote literacy in moderation, and Lumintang (2022) discussed how Christian theology aligns with national values in Indonesia's pluralist context. These works highlight the importance of cultural roots in shaping tolerance narratives but do not yet explain how this cultural capital can be leveraged for diplomacy at regional or global levels.

Third, some research focuses on the role of youth and education in shaping moderate attitudes. Pajarianto et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of intellectual humility in fostering tolerance among young people. Mulyana (2023) evaluated the representation of moderation in Islamic education textbooks, while Salu (2023) linked moderation with the Christian mission of hospitality. These studies affirm education as a primary medium for cultivating moderate dispositions, but few explore education as a tool for diplomacy or as a means for internationalizing moderation discourse.

From these three tendencies, it is evident that research on religious moderation in Indonesia tends to concentrate on internal institutional strengthening, local cultural roots, and formal education. Unfortunately, very few studies directly assess Indonesia's potential as a model for ASEAN or global contexts. Even fewer examine Indonesia's active role in promoting moderation through international conferences, multilateral cooperation, or as an instrument of soft diplomacy. This gap presents a critical research opportunity for transnationally oriented inquiry.

This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the potential and challenges of internationalizing religious moderation as a global model based on Indonesia's experience. The primary focus is on the policies and practices developed by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, and how these principles can be adapted by ASEAN countries and applied in international forums. Additionally, this study explores Indonesia's diplomatic role in advancing regional and global cooperation rooted in moderation values.

The main argument advanced in this study is that Indonesia's systematically implemented religious moderation should not be seen merely as a domestic policy. Instead, this approach holds strong potential to serve as an adaptive model that fills strategic gaps in other multireligious countries, especially within ASEAN. With consistent policy support, a robust religious-social base, and experience in peacefully confronting extremism, Indonesia is strategically positioned to serve as a moral leader and promoter of religious moderation diplomacy at regional and global levels. The research hypothesis asserts that the success of internationalizing religious moderation depends on the strength of Indonesia's public diplomacy capacity, transnational partnerships, and the adaptability of moderation values to other socio-cultural contexts.

METHOD

This study aims to analyze the extent to which religious moderation can be promoted at the global level, with a specific focus on the ASEAN region. The primary unit of analysis is the religious moderation policy developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as well as how this policy can be adapted by other ASEAN countries. In addition, the research examines the relevance and implementation of international events or forums on religious moderation held at both the ASEAN and global levels to understand the degree to which this discourse has been received and adopted as a cross-national policy reference.

This research employs a qualitative approach using library research combined with a case study method and document analysis (Lune & Berg, 2017; Supriatna et al., 2024). This approach allows the researcher to explore in-depth the meanings, perceptions, and policy practices of religious moderation based on officially published written sources from both government institutions and international organizations. A qualitative approach is also suitable for exploring complex socio-political and cultural contexts that cannot be captured through quantitative methods.

The data used in this study fall into two main categories. First, primary data come from official documents and reports published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, such as the *Religious Moderation Roadmap*, the *National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN)*, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, and documentation of events such as *KMBAAA*, *ICROM*, and other international forums related to the mainstreaming of religious moderation. Second, secondary data consist of reports, scholarly articles, news, and other official publications accessible online. These sources provide information regarding ASEAN countries' participation in religious moderation forums and the responses and acceptance of this concept in various international contexts.

The data collection technique involves reviewing literature and official documentation. The researcher systematically analyzes the documents to identify policy content, strategic narratives, implementation records, and both achievements and challenges in implementing religious moderation at the national and international levels. Online reports and global publications are also examined to broaden the understanding of global perceptions toward Indonesia's approach.

The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis (Sun et al., 2025). This process includes identifying and categorizing key themes that emerge from both primary and secondary documents, such as the construction of religious moderation in public policy, moderation diplomacy strategies in ASEAN, and the internationalization of this concept in global forums. The analysis is interpretative, taking into account the socio-political contexts that influence the reception and adoption of religious moderation in each country. The findings are presented in thematic narratives that lead to a synthesis of the opportunities and challenges of internationalizing religious moderation, as well as Indonesia's strategic position in the architecture of global peace.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Religious Moderation Policy by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has pioneered the mainstreaming of religious moderation values through systematic and sustainable policies. The ministry understands religious moderation not simply as a normative appeal to take a "middle ground," but as a socio-political strategy to nurture harmony, reject extremism, and build cohesion in plural societies. The President of Indonesia has institutionalized this policy by embedding it in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN 2020–2024) and reinforcing it through Presidential Regulation Number 58 of 2023. Through this legislation, religious moderation has evolved from a sectoral agenda of the Ministry into a guiding principle across ministries and local governments (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

The policy touches various aspects of religious and social life: education, media, public services, and international diplomacy. In the education sector, the ministry integrates religious moderation into madrasah curricula and religious education programs. It also expands the *Religious Moderation Training* program to reach civil servants (ASN), lecturers, religious teachers, marriage registrars, religious counselors, and echelon officials nationwide (Chomsah, 2025). Regional Religious Training Centers actively host sessions covering tolerance, respect for local traditions, and interfaith dialogue skills. The ministry even launched Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)-based online training to reach participants outside working hours, thus enhancing access and flexibility (Umam, 2025).

In the public sphere, the ministry adopts a participatory approach by embedding moderation messages into religious events such as *Blessed Fridays*, religious holiday commemorations, and *takziyah* (Kemenag RI, 2023b). These events serve not only symbolic purposes but also internalize tolerance values collectively. Additionally, the ministry strengthens inter- and intra-faith cooperation through interreligious dialogue and harmony forums that engage not only religious elites but also grassroots community members.

The ministry leverages digital media as a pillar of its religious moderation campaign. It actively produces and disseminates positive educational content through social media, religious news portals, and streaming platforms. This digital campaign also serves as a counter-narrative against mass religious extremism across cyberspace. Publications such as the soft-launch of the *Religious Moderation* concept and participation by national figures like Alissa Wahid provide moral and social momentum for the program's sustainability (Khoeron, 2025).

Institutionally, the ministry has reinforced its implementation with the drafting of the *Religious Moderation Roadmap 2021–2024* and planning for the 2025–2029 period. This document serves as a technocratic guideline for medium-term strategy design. In policy forums, the Head of the Ministry's Research and Training Agency, Prof. Suyitno, emphasizes that the program's success should not rely solely on administrative reports but on its

transformative impact on religious communities. The term *beragama maslahat* in the RPJMN reflects the integration of religious values with ecology, culture, and social development.

To ensure policy effectiveness, the ministry develops data-based monitoring tools such as the *Religious Harmony Index (IKUB)* and the *Cultural Development Index*. The IKUB target for 2029 is set at a minimum score of 78 (Sya'bani, 2024). Moreover, the implementation is supported by the *Five Actions of Religious Moderation*, which include mapping strategic groups, designing creative programs, promoting cross-institutional synergy, and conducting regular evaluations. The ministry categorizes program performance into green, yellow, and red statuses to assess interagency success in implementing moderation principles (Barjah, 2024).

Concrete successes appear at the local level, such as in SMAN 1 Bae Kudus, where the religious moderation program improved student tolerance and reduced intolerance incidents. In civil society, interfaith events such as *Cap Go Meh* in Singkawang—featuring Confucian, Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist communities—demonstrate real-world cultural implementation of moderation. The ministry also facilitates the establishment of *Joint Secretariat for Religious Moderation (Sekber MB)* at regional levels, aligning national agendas with local contexts (Rozaq et al., 2024).

Challenges persist, including ideological resistance, public misconceptions about the meaning of moderation, and electoral politics that sometimes instrumentalize religious issues. Therefore, the ministry outlines a multi-level approach: from national regulation drafting to community-level dialogue, from ASN training to media literacy. These systemic efforts have led to a cultural transformation toward a more inclusive and adaptable religious ethos.

The ministry also actively internationalizes religious moderation as a form of soft diplomacy. Indonesia's participation in global forums such as the Asia–Africa Conference on Religious Moderation in Bandung serves as a platform to promote best practices in interreligious harmony. The Minister of Religious Affairs, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, underscores that this program is the President's direct mandate and a strategic national policy. Thus, religious moderation not only addresses domestic challenges but also represents Indonesia's contribution to global peace (Ayu, 2023).

Supported by policy, regulation, education, media, and cross-sector collaboration, the ministry's implementation of religious moderation demonstrates that the program goes beyond normative campaigning—it constitutes a measurable, long-term social development model. Indonesia's success opens opportunities for adoption by other countries, especially in ASEAN, which face similar social complexities. Therefore, religious moderation deserves positioning as an alternative approach that bridges faith and humanity in an increasingly polarized global order.

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has implemented a comprehensive series of programs and initiatives to promote religious moderation. These efforts demonstrate a holistic approach spanning education, digital media, interfaith cooperation, local culture, and international diplomacy. Below is a summary table:

Table 1. Visualization of Religious Moderation Programs by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia

No	Program / Initiative	Implementation Details
1	Education & Religious Moderation Training	Offered to civil servants, teachers, lecturers, and students nationwide through training centers and MOOC Pintar
2	Strengthening Social Media & Digital Campaigns	Producing educational content and counter-narratives against extremism across digital platforms
3	Interfaith Dialogue & Intra-religious Cooperation	Facilitated by the ministry to foster harmony through dialogue and community forums
4	Roadmap & Indicators (IKUB, Cultural Index)	Forming the technocratic foundation of RPJMN and serving as evaluation metrics for moderation
5	Five Actions on Religious Moderation	Including mapping, implementation, synergy, evaluation, and creative participatory programming
6	Establishing Regional Joint Secretariat (Sekber)	Creating decentralized institutional structures with local governments' involvement in moderation efforts
7	Participation in International Forums	Example: Asia–Africa Conference on Religious Moderation in Bandung, as soft diplomacy
8	National Regulation (Presidential Reg. No. 58/2023)	Providing legal basis across ministries and local governments for integrating moderation agenda

9	Community-Based & Local Cultural Activities	Example: Interfaith <i>Cap Go Meh</i> celebration in Singkawang as a cultural expression of tolerance
10	Online Training (<i>MOOC Pintar</i>)	On-demand online training to enhance access for civil servants to understand moderation values

Source: Research Results, 2025.

These ten flagship initiatives illustrate the Ministry's structured and inclusive approach to implementing religious moderation. The programs span formal education and civil servant training to soft diplomacy and cross-cultural engagement. Initiatives like *MOOC Pintar* and regional *Sekber* carefully ensure that the ministry promotes moderation not only at the national level but also within local contexts. Quantitative indicators such as IKUB and Cultural Development Index serve as measurable tools to evaluate the internalization of moderation values in Indonesian society.

The ministry's religious moderation agenda seeks to cultivate a society characterized by harmony, tolerance, and respect for religious and cultural diversity. The ministry achieves this through multiple channels: training civil servants, educators, and students on moderation values; distributing positive messages across social media; drafting policy frameworks and establishing baseline indicators such as IKUB; fostering interfaith dialogue and community collaboration; issuing formal regulations like Presidential Regulation No. 58/2023; supporting cultural events like *Cap Go Meh* for grassroots engagement; and enabling international visibility through diplomacy (Muchamad Sidik Sisdiyanto, 2024).

Based on the visual data presented, several key patterns can be identified that characterize the holistic implementation of religious moderation by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. First, the ministry employs a multidimensional approach, integrating religious moderation into diverse domains such as formal education, social media campaigns, community engagement, and international diplomacy. This strategy ensures that the values of moderation reach various societal layers through tailored and context-sensitive initiatives. Second, there is policy and institutional consistency, as demonstrated by the development of performance indicators like the Religious Harmony Index (IKUB), the establishment of a strategic roadmap, and the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 58/2023. These measures ensure that religious moderation is not merely rhetorical, but a program embedded in the bureaucratic and regulatory framework of national governance. Third, the ministry promotes decentralization and grassroots involvement, particularly through the establishment of Joint Secretariat (*Sekber*) offices at the regional level and the facilitation of cultural events involving interfaith communities, such as the *Cap Go Meh* celebration in Singkawang. These efforts show a clear commitment to embedding moderation as a living value within local communities. Lastly, digital transformation and capacity building become essential pillars of implementation, as evidenced by the use of *MOOC Pintar* (Massive Open Online Course) and targeted training programs for civil servants, educators, and religious leaders. This reflects the ministry's adaptive response to technological challenges while preparing human resources to serve as agents of moderation in an increasingly digital society.

In summary, the ministry has transformed the concept of religious moderation from moral discourse into a data-driven, systematic, and socially embedded national policy. These patterns indicate that Indonesia is constructing a structured, participatory model of moderation that others in ASEAN and beyond can emulate. Ultimately, religious moderation emerges as an approach that bridges faith and humanity in a deeply polarized global order.

ASEAN Countries' Response to Religious Moderation

Religious moderation has entered a new phase as a shared discourse and practice within the ASEAN regional framework. Indonesia, as the pioneer of this concept, has not only institutionalized it through national policies led by the Ministry of Religious Affairs but has also actively promoted its dissemination to neighboring Southeast Asian countries. This effort has been realized through various transnational forums, such as the *Workshop on Religious Moderation* under the theme *Strengthening the Manhaj of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah* held in Jakarta. In this program, student delegations from Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam engaged in dialogues on how the principles of moderation could serve as the foundation for peaceful and balanced religious life in their respective countries (Indah, 2024).

These activities reflect the strengthening of regional collaboration, positioning religious moderation as both a cultural and political strategy to sustain harmony within ASEAN's multicultural setting. The Director-General of

Islamic Community Guidance, Kamaruddin Amin, emphasized that moderation is not merely a local value but a shared foundation for maintaining social stability. Through programs such as the placement of more than 200 Indonesian imams in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia has also demonstrated how moderation can be implemented transnationally as a form of religious and cultural diplomacy.

The resonance of this idea is also evident in youth participation through initiatives such as the *ASEAN Youth Interfaith Camp (AYIC)* held in Central Java. The camp brought together interfaith youth from Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Singapore, with support from the Central Java provincial government (Pratama, 2023). During the forum, participants cultivated values of tolerance and moderation through discussions, *live-ins* with multi-religious communities, and idea exchanges aimed at building youth movements that embrace diversity. Governor Ganjar Pranowo highlighted the vital role of young people in maintaining regional peace and encouraged them to promote peace and reject extremism through concrete actions (Tempo.co, 2021).

Cooperation among ASEAN member states regarding religious moderation has also intensified through official forums such as the *ASEAN Islamic Conference* held in Bali. This conference brought together religious leaders, scholars, and representatives of Islamic organizations from the eleven ASEAN nations, along with Saudi Arabia. The overarching theme—*Khairu Ummah*—reflected the collective resolve of participating countries to discuss strategies for strengthening moderation, preventing extremism, and empowering Muslim communities in the digital age (Efendi, 2022). Discussions were not limited to normative matters but also included practical measures such as promoting social harmony, addressing inter-cultural preaching challenges, and implementing inclusive Islamic education models.

The participation of ASEAN countries in such forums indicates a degree of openness and enthusiasm for adopting the values of religious moderation. Countries such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore actively sent delegates to interfaith events, while others like the Philippines and Thailand engaged in discussions on combating radicalism among Muslim minority communities (Setkab.go.id, 2022). However, this response remains uneven across the region. Nations such as Myanmar, Laos, and parts of southern Thailand continue to face serious challenges including religious discrimination, ethnic conflict, and structural violence against minority groups.

This paradox highlights Southeast Asia's dual reality (Wulan, 2022). On one hand, ASEAN is home to the world's largest Muslim population and boasts a tradition of moderate and inclusive Islam, as noted by Prof. Azyumardi Azra and Prof. Iqbal Arifin Mansurnoor. *Islam Nusantara*, which thrives in Indonesia, parts of Malaysia, and Brunei, represents a model of religiosity rooted in the value of *wasathiyah* (balance). On the other hand, the region still grapples with the complexities of multiculturalism, evidenced by the expulsion of the Rohingya in Myanmar, discrimination against the Moro people in the Philippines, and ongoing ethnic tensions in southern Thailand—proving that moderation has yet to be fully internalized as a collective regional standard (Atmam, 2022).

It is worth noting that despite constitutional support for religious freedom as outlined in the *ASEAN Human Rights Declaration*, implementation remains uneven. Several religious and ethnic minorities—such as the Khmer Rouge, Karen, and Lao communities—continue to face systemic marginalization (ASEAN, 2019). Within ASEAN's framework, religious moderation has not yet emerged as a benchmark for universal values like human rights, pluralism, and social justice. Therefore, a more systematic and collaborative approach is necessary to elevate moderation from mere narrative to concrete, jointly implemented policy.

One significant milestone in advancing religious moderation on regional and global scales was the successful organization of the *International Conference on Religious Moderation (ICROM) 2023*. This event gathered delegations from ASEAN countries, as well as participants from Europe, Africa, and the United Arab Emirates. Seventy scholars presented academic papers analyzing religious life across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The conference's major outcome was the formulation of strategic recommendations to strengthen religious moderation and harmony, especially in ASEAN, where religious and cultural diversity is exceptionally high (Kemenag RI, 2023a).

Adib, the Director of Islamic Affairs and Sharia Development at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, emphasized that the conference aimed to address the complex challenges of nurturing harmony and interreligious peace. The ICROM 2023 recommendations were developed in response to the evolving socio-religious dynamics in ASEAN countries, which remain vulnerable to identity-based polarization and rising religious intolerance. The conference served as clear evidence that Indonesia is not only advancing religious moderation domestically but also emerging as a moral and intellectual leader in promoting regional cooperation on the issue.

Dedi Slamet Riyadi, Head of the Subdirector for Religious Understanding and Conflict Resolution, added that inter-state collaboration on religious moderation in ASEAN holds significant strategic value. Given the region's high religious diversity, a shared platform is essential for exchanging experiences, information, and policy strategies. The ICROM 2023 recommendations reflect a collective understanding of the need to build inclusive, open-minded, and respectful approaches to religious difference.

The global community also recognized ICROM 2023. Imam Shefiu Abdulkareem Majemu, a representative from Nigeria's *Strength in Diversity Development Centre*, expressed admiration for Indonesia's religious moderation approach. He deemed it highly relevant to Nigeria—a country comprising over 200 ethnic groups and more than 500 religious communities. He stated that Nigeria seeks to build a tolerant and inclusive society and hopes to partner with Indonesia in crafting effective moderation policy frameworks.

The engagement of non-ASEAN countries such as Nigeria in Indonesia's religious moderation discourse shows that this value-based diplomacy has transcended regional boundaries. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country with relative socio-political stability, Indonesia has the legitimacy to serve as a *moral anchor* in shaping adaptable moderation approaches for diverse social contexts in both Asia and Africa. Conferences like ICROM offer a crucial platform for constructing an *epistemic community* across nations focused on harmony, inclusivity, and anti-radicalism.

In conclusion, ASEAN countries' responses to religious moderation reflect significant potential yet remain uneven. There is ample room to expand cooperation, develop shared normative frameworks, and build inclusive policy infrastructures. With its extensive experience in fostering interfaith harmony, Indonesia holds a strategic role as a regional engine in positioning religious moderation as a shared ASEAN identity amid increasingly complex global challenges.

Table 2. Visualization of ASEAN Countries' Participation and Response to Religious Moderation

No	Activity / Forum	Participating Countries	Type of Engagement / Response
1	<i>Religious Moderation Workshop</i> (2024)	Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei	Inter-ASEAN student dialogue to reinforce <i>Manhaj Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah</i> principles
2	<i>ASEAN Youth Interfaith Camp</i> – Central Java	Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia	Interfaith youth idea exchange and <i>live-in</i> experience in multireligious communities
3	<i>ASEAN Islamic Conference</i> – Bali (2022)	All ASEAN countries + Saudi Arabia	Forum of scholars and academics to prevent extremism and strengthen social harmony
4	<i>International Conference on Religious Moderation (ICROM)</i> – Jakarta (2023)	ASEAN, Europe, Africa, UAE, Nigeria	Assembly of 70 international researchers; produced moderation policy recommendations for ASEAN
5	Deployment of Indonesian Imams Abroad	Saudi Arabia (indirectly related to ASEAN)	Over 200 imams sent as part of Indonesia's religious moderation diplomacy
6	Regional Challenges: Ethnic and Religious Conflict (Myanmar, Southern Thailand, Philippines)	Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines	Sectarian and ethnic tensions as major barriers to full adoption of religious moderation
7	Nigeria's Appreciation of ICROM	Nigeria	Expressed interest in adopting Indonesia's moderation model and establishing cooperation

Source: Research Results, 2025.

This table presents the degree of participation by ASEAN countries in religious moderation forums, along with the challenges that persist in certain regions. While countries like Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore exhibit active engagement, other areas such as Myanmar and Southern Thailand still face structural obstacles. Meanwhile, Indonesia's influence has extended as far as Africa, offering new opportunities for interregional collaboration. The

table affirms that ASEAN countries generally respond positively to religious moderation, although disparities in implementation remain.

The data reveals that promoting religious moderation in the ASEAN region is not merely rhetorical—it has been realized through concrete programs involving students, youth, scholars, religious leaders, and state institutions across member states. Activities such as the *Religious Moderation Workshop* and the *ASEAN Youth Interfaith Camp* have served as vital platforms for intergenerational dialogue, fostering tolerance and coexistence. Regional-scale conferences like the *ASEAN Islamic Conference* in Bali and *ICROM 2023* in Jakarta further underscore ASEAN's commitment to religious moderation as a foundational principle of peaceful, inclusive social life. The participation of countries such as Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Singapore reflects openness to these values. However, challenges persist in several countries, including ethnic conflicts in Myanmar and Southern Thailand, which hinder the full integration of moderation into national contexts.

From the compiled activities and findings, several key patterns emerge. First, ASEAN promotes religious moderation through participatory and youth-centered approaches. Programs like the *ASEAN Youth Interfaith Camp* highlight the recognition that youth play a critical role in sustaining peace and inclusivity for future generations. These young participants engage in dialogue, live within multireligious communities, and co-create initiatives to promote tolerance.

Second, regional cooperation among ASEAN countries is strengthening, led by Indonesia. Through its Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia has initiated a series of transnational forums and conferences that unite religious and social actors from diverse backgrounds. The active participation of countries such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore demonstrates a collective commitment to embedding religious moderation as a shared regional value.

Third, Indonesia's religious moderation diplomacy is extending beyond ASEAN, as evidenced by the involvement of delegates from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East in *ICROM 2023*. Nigeria's favorable response reflects the global relevance of Indonesia's experience in managing religious diversity, offering an inspiring model for other nations facing multicultural and sectarian challenges.

Fourth, significant gaps remain in the acceptance and implementation of religious moderation across ASEAN. Countries such as Myanmar, Southern Thailand, and parts of the Philippines still struggle with structural and social conflicts that delay the full adoption of moderation principles. These variations imply that the success of religious moderation in ASEAN depends heavily on each country's domestic political and social landscape.

In conclusion, ASEAN countries have shown a generally positive and progressive response to religious moderation, particularly through forum participation and cooperative initiatives. However, to institutionalize religious moderation as a collective regional pillar, ASEAN must adopt more systematic efforts to address implementation gaps and build a strong normative consensus among member states. Indonesia, with its extensive experience in fostering interfaith harmony, holds a strategic position to continue leading this agenda as part of its regional contribution to cross-national peace and social cohesion.

Relevance of Religious Moderation at the Global Level

In the global context marked by rising interstate conflicts, religious extremism, and humanitarian crises, religious moderation has gained strategic relevance as both an ethical and practical approach to fostering world peace. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has actively mainstreamed religious moderation as part of its international public diplomacy. This was manifested concretely in the organization of the Conference on Religious Moderation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (KMBAAA), held in Bandung on December 20–22, 2023. More than just an academic forum, the conference served as an international platform to bring together leaders, religious figures, and diplomats from Global South countries—such as Brazil, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico—to deliberate the relevance of religious moderation as a solution to geopolitical tensions and global humanitarian crises (Sani, 2023).

Inspired by the spirit of the 1955 Asian-African Conference, KMBAAA adopted the theme *Religion and Humanity* and featured prominent interfaith and intercultural figures from around the world. Keynote speakers such as Prof. Nahlah Al-Shoaidy from Egypt, *Mahamahopadhyaya* Bhadreshdas Swami from India, and Prof. Haiming Wen from China joined Indonesian religious leaders like KH Yahya Cholil Staquf (PBNU) and Prof. Haedar Nashir (PP Muhammadiyah) to discuss essential sub-themes. These included moderation in religious texts, the role of women in peacebuilding, the challenge of digital radicalism, and the importance of tolerance in a multicultural era.

The event underscored that religious moderation has evolved into a global discourse cutting across faiths, nations, and civilizations (Ayu, 2023).

The global relevance of religious moderation is not only reflected in large-scale forums like KMBAAA but also in Indonesia's *soft diplomacy* initiatives. Amid the failures of various United Nations Security Council resolutions to curb conflicts—as seen in Gaza and Ukraine—religious moderation emerges as an alternative strategy for upholding humanity and rejecting violence in the name of religion. It extends beyond interfaith tolerance to encompass social justice, human rights, and sustainable development. Consequently, the Ministry of Religious Affairs promotes moderation as Indonesia's contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a religious perspective.

Education plays a vital role in transforming religious moderation from an idea into tangible practice. The ministry actively organizes cross-national training programs, such as the *Religious Moderation Workshop for MABIMS Students*, which brings together participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore (M Sidik Sisdiyanto, 2024). These programs not only introduce the values of *Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah* but also instill the spirit of interreligious and intercultural dialogue from an early age. In an age of radical information flows, students serve as key actors in rejecting extremism and becoming peace agents who are critical, empathetic, and tolerant.

The global relevance of religious moderation is also evident in the positive responses from the international community. Practices in Muslim-majority countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and Oman illustrate how governments can maintain pluralism while upholding religious moral authority. These nations have pursued legal, educational, and social policy routes that promote inclusivity and are now considered models for global interfaith diplomacy. Indonesia, through its Ministry of Religious Affairs and religious organizations, continues to expand collaborative networks with these countries to reinforce a global ecosystem that rejects religious-based radicalism and violence.

In the midst of a world increasingly vulnerable to conflict, climate change, and identity crises, religious moderation serves as a strong cultural foundation for building global social cohesion. For the younger generation, moderation education goes beyond religious knowledge; it trains them to become global citizens who think critically and openly. Students who understand moderation are less likely to fall into narrow, textual, and exclusionary religious interpretations and more inclined to promote dialogical, contextual, and humanistic understandings of faith. This long-term investment cultivates future global leadership that is wise and civilized.

By hosting forums like KMBAAA and strengthening cross-national education, Indonesia not only demonstrates its domestic capacity to maintain harmony but also offers a strategic model for how religion can serve as a source of solutions rather than conflict. On the global level, religious moderation has moved from an internal agenda to a tool of cultural diplomacy capable of reaching Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. This agenda further strengthens Indonesia's position as a global moral leader that upholds tolerance and peace (Sani, 2023).

In conclusion, religious moderation holds significant global relevance. It serves as a medium to prevent violence, bridge differences, foster cross-national collaboration, and inspire peaceful thinking amid a world plagued by social and identity fragmentation. Indonesia has played a vital role as a pioneer of global moderation and is increasingly recognized as a strategic partner by many countries in weaving a new hope for a more humane global civilization.

Table 3. Visualization of Key Agendas and Actors in Religious Moderation at the Global Level

No	Agenda / Activity	Actors / Countries Involved	Goals / Impact
1	Asia-Africa-Latin America Conference on Religious Moderation (KMBAAA)	Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, PBNU, Muhammadiyah	Revive the spirit of the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference; promote peace and Global South solidarity
2	Plenary & Parallel Sessions of KMBAAA	Global religious leaders (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism), international scholars	Interfaith and intercultural dialogue; strengthening literacy on moderation, tolerance, and social justice
3	MABIMS Student Religious Moderation Workshop	Students from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore	Cross-national education, fostering young peacebuilders and tolerance agents

4	Religious Moderation through International Forums	Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, Vice Minister, UN delegates, embassies	Position moderation as soft diplomacy to address global crises (Gaza, Ukraine, etc.)
5	Comparative Studies and Global Learning	Morocco, Oman, Jordan	Inspire best practices of religious moderation in state governance and religious education systems

Source: Research Results, 2025.

This table summarizes five key agendas and actors in mainstreaming religious moderation at the global level. The KMBAAA forum serves as a strategic meeting point between Global South countries and global interfaith leaders to voice the importance of peace and tolerance in responding to global crises. Meanwhile, cross-national educational approaches, such as the MABIMS program, demonstrate that religious moderation has also been embedded from an early age as a long-term investment. Practices from countries like Morocco, Oman, and Jordan have become important references for Indonesia and the global community in building peaceful, equitable, and inclusive religious governance. This visualization affirms that religious moderation has evolved into a concrete and collaborative global agenda (Sani, 2023).

The data presented shows that religious moderation has developed into a structured and tangible global agenda. Indonesia, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has not only initiated domestic programs but also actively expanded the reach of this idea internationally through various cross-national forums. The Asia-Africa-Latin America Conference on Religious Moderation (KMBAAA) stands out as a prominent example of how religious moderation functions as a tool to build global solidarity, especially among Global South countries. This forum brought together heads of state and religious leaders, as well as scholars, diplomats, and students from various backgrounds, to engage in joint dialogue. Educational initiatives such as the MABIMS Student Religious Moderation Workshop embed the values of tolerance and harmony from a young age at the ASEAN level. Furthermore, Indonesia continues to learn from countries such as Oman, Morocco, and Jordan, which have long implemented similar moderation approaches in their education systems and social policies. Thus, religious moderation has moved beyond an ethical discourse to become a strategic instrument for building peace, preventing conflict, and upholding humanity amidst today's global complexities.

Several key patterns emerge from the data presented. First, Indonesia employs religious moderation as a form of soft diplomacy amid tense global geopolitics. Forums like KMBAAA illustrate how Indonesia leverages its moral capacity and reputation as a moderate Muslim country to lead the narrative of peace among Global South nations—especially in response to the failure of global institutions to resolve conflicts like those in Gaza and Ukraine.

Second, cross-border education emerges as a core strategy in shaping a tolerant global generation. Training programs and student workshops across ASEAN, such as MABIMS, serve as concrete efforts to instill moderate values among youth. These approaches not only nurture tolerance but also train students to engage in dialogue, think critically, and reject extremism from an early age.

Third, strengthening religious and cultural literacy serves as a cornerstone in mainstreaming religious moderation. In various parallel sessions at KMBAAA, speakers from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and non-religious communities discussed crucial issues such as identity politics, social justice, gender equality, and digital media. This indicates that religious moderation has become a shared point of convergence across faiths and beliefs in addressing a fragmented world.

Fourth, Indonesia has begun to build a global *epistemic community* that supports values of moderation and inclusivity. Collaborations with countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and Oman demonstrate that this agenda is collaborative—driven not only from the top-down by states, but also horizontally among nations that share similar experiences in managing religious diversity.

As a preliminary conclusion, religious moderation has transformed into a global platform for building cross-border peace. By grounding this agenda in education, dialogue, and interstate cooperation, it opens a path toward forming an international community that is more peaceful, just, and mutually respectful. Indonesia, in this position, serves not only as an actor but as a trusted moral leader voicing humanity's hope for a more harmonious future.

DISCUSSION

This study finds that the religious moderation policy developed by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has evolved into a structured and strategic public policy, encompassing a wide range of domains from education and institutional strengthening to international diplomacy. This policy has been successfully implemented at the national level and has begun to receive positive responses regionally within ASEAN and globally. Through programs such as *Konferensi Moderasi Beragama Asia-Afrika dan Amerika Latin* (KMBAAA), *International Conference on Religious Moderation* (ICROM), and *MABIMS Student Workshops*, Indonesia has demonstrated the capacity to position religious moderation as a value that resonates across cultures and faiths. However, adoption and acceptance in other countries remain selective and contextual, shaped by each country's internal socio-political conditions.

Indonesia's religious moderation policy shows a positive correlation with the responses of ASEAN and global partners, especially in the context of promoting social harmony and countering extremism. Countries such as Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore have demonstrated openness to this model, whereas countries like Myanmar and Thailand face internal obstacles, including ethnic conflicts and religious tensions. Factors influencing the acceptance of moderation include similarities in multireligious social structures, the level of extremist threats, and the government's willingness to reform religious policies. At the global level, the relevance of religious moderation has risen alongside increasing concerns about identity-based violence and the ineffectiveness of global institutions—such as the UN Security Council—in addressing humanitarian crises.

The success of religious moderation in Indonesia rests on three main factors: political endorsement from the state (*top-down policy*), active involvement of religious organizations (*bottom-up movement*), and a cultural foundation that upholds the value of *wasathiyah*. Conversely, the failure or resistance to adopt similar policies in other countries often stems from sectarian political dynamics, strong ethnocentrism, and the lack of institutional capacity to facilitate interfaith harmony. For example, in Myanmar, the Rohingya issue and the dominance of religious majoritarianism constitute serious barriers to building inclusive dialogue. This suggests that the success of religious moderation depends on how effectively the political system, civil society structures, and local cultures can synergize in supporting value transformation.

These findings align with studies by As'ad (2021) and Ropi (2019), which emphasize the role of the state and higher education institutions in mainstreaming religious moderation. However, in contrast to local approaches found in the works of Ginting (2021), Hernawan et al. (2021), and Mulyana (2023)—which focus on strengthening the culture of moderation within communities and educational media—this study reveals that religious moderation also has a diplomatic dimension that can be translated into international forums. Moreover, unlike previous studies that concentrate on value internalization at the national level, this research highlights how Indonesia plays an active role in the internationalization of moderation through soft diplomacy and multilateral cooperation.

The primary novelty of this study lies in its focus on the potential of religious moderation as a model for cultural diplomacy and as a cross-national policy mechanism. By utilizing official documents from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and data from interregional forums as primary sources, this research shows that religious moderation can function not only as a domestic agenda but also as a normative proposition adaptable within ASEAN and the Global South. It further presents a new perspective that religious moderation serves not only as an internal normative policy but also as a tool of global moral leadership.

Historically, Indonesia has maintained a long-standing tradition of managing pluralism, beginning from the Hindu-Buddhist era through the Islamic period and colonial rule. During the Hindu-Buddhist period, religious practice in the archipelago was marked by *syncretism*, where local beliefs harmoniously blended with Hindu and Buddhist teachings, resulting in inclusive social and cultural structures (Makin, 2016). When Islam arrived between the 13th and 16th centuries, the pattern of integration continued: Islamic *dakwah* was conducted peacefully and culturally, accommodating local practices such as *slametan* and pilgrimage (*ziarah*), giving rise to a moderate and adaptive form of Islam (Laffan, 2003). The Dutch colonial period further enriched Indonesia's pluralism. Despite the often exploitative relationship between the colonial government and the Muslim population (Manse, 2024), this interaction fostered social-religious responses emphasizing compromise, cultural resilience, and *pesantren*-based intellectualism.

After independence, religious pluralism was formally institutionalized through *Pancasila*, the state ideology that guarantees inclusive divinity (Nolte, 2015). Indonesia's legal system also reflects *legal pluralism*, where customary law, Islamic law, and civil law coexist in areas such as marriage, inheritance, and local autonomy (Lukito, 2012; Nugraha et al., 2023). The decentralization process since 1999 has further strengthened the expression of

local identities that reconcile Islamic values with regional customs, as seen in Aceh, Minangkabau, and Yogyakarta (Hill & Hupe, 2014; Salim et al., 2023). However, this diversity has also triggered contemporary challenges, including the rise of new conservatism and growing pressure on religious minorities (Arfa & Lasaiba, 2022; Nasir, 2019), which now test the endurance of Indonesia's pluralist foundation.

Through international forums such as KMBAAA, Indonesia seeks to revive the spirit of Asia-Africa solidarity that was pioneered during the 1955 Bandung Conference. This time, however, Indonesia rearticulates its historical pluralism in the framework of religious moderation as an instrument of global peace. By inviting countries from the Global South, Indonesia not only promotes a progressive postcolonial narrative but also underscores that moderation is not a Western import. Instead, it emerges from Indonesia's own long history of identity negotiation and endogenous spiritual-political integration. Thus, Indonesia's role in religious moderation diplomacy today is not merely technocratic but historical—bringing centuries of pluralist heritage into global forums.

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious moderation serves as a mechanism for harmonizing social life in plural societies. In the context of ASEAN and beyond, this model offers a viable tool for reducing religious-based tensions, especially in areas suffering from prolonged conflict, such as Gaza, Myanmar, and Mindanao. Religious moderation is not only a normative discourse; it also constitutes a practical framework that fosters healthy and productive social interactions through tolerance, interfaith dialogue, education, and institutional strengthening (Muhdiarta, 2025). In Indonesia, the *Forum for Religious Harmony* (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* or FKUB) exemplifies how participatory communication and interfaith dialogue prevent social disintegration in multicultural settings such as Medan (Hati, 2023). Education has also become a strategic channel for cultivating moderate values, as evidenced by the implementation of religious moderation curricula in *Madrasah Aliyah* in Bandung, which emphasizes balance, tolerance, and responsibility (Hambali et al., 2022).

Furthermore, religious moderation strengthens family and community resilience, especially when grounded in values of equality and open communication (Fadil et al., 2024). One example is the *Khalwatiyah Syekh Yusuf Al-Makassary tariqa* community in South Sulawesi, which has demonstrated how an inclusive and humanistic *Sufi* approach fosters national commitment and rejects violence (Azis et al., 2024). On a global scale, religious moderation has proven effective as a counter-narrative to extremism, offering a religious approach that is just, balanced, and peace-oriented (Bahri et al., 2025; Masykur et al., 2024). Nevertheless, challenges remain. In regions such as Gorontalo (Indonesia) and Negeri Sembilan (Malaysia), tensions persist around the acceptance of religious diversity in terminology and interpretation (Hunowu et al., 2025). Therefore, the implementation of religious moderation must continually adapt to evolving social dynamics and be supported by innovative, context-sensitive, and cross-sectoral approaches (Sihotang et al., 2025). These findings further reinforce the position of religious moderation as a vital instrument in building sustainable peace within diverse societies.

Ideologically, religious moderation constitutes a rejection of two extremes: exclusive fundamentalism and liberal relativism. It offers a middle path that frames religious values within a universal humanistic context. The concept rejects dogmatic rigidity and exclusivity characteristic of fundamentalism, while also rejecting the nihilism of liberal relativism that denies the relevance of religious norms and truths (Carlucci, 2015; Kindermann et al., 2025; Long, 2011). Religious moderation establishes a balanced perspective that promotes inclusivity, tolerance, and interreligious dialogue, and emphasizes humanistic and non-violent values (Masykur et al., 2024; Rusmana et al., 2025; Tinambunan et al., 2025). In this context, the *Sufi* approach developed by the *Khalwatiyah Syekh Yusuf Al-Makassary tariqa* also illustrates a form of moderation that is not only religious but also nationalist and non-hegemonic (Azis et al., 2024).

These findings reaffirm that a country with the world's largest Muslim population, such as Indonesia, can lead global discourse on non-hegemonic and diversity-embracing religiosity. The model of religious moderation implemented in Indonesia not only helps to suppress extremism but also opens space for the renewal of religious thought within the framework of *Pancasila* and global values (Daheri, 2023; Fadil et al., 2024). While many countries continue to struggle with the dilemma between religious conservatism and secular liberalism, Indonesia demonstrates that religion can serve as an integrative force that promotes inclusivity and social justice (Brekke, 2011; Cholil, 2022). Therefore, religious moderation is not merely a national strategy but also represents Indonesia's ideological contribution to a polarized world.

Despite its strong institutional structure and stable political support, the implementation of religious moderation—both in Indonesia and in other countries—is not immune to dysfunctions. First, religious moderation is often misunderstood as a form of religious domestication or neutralization by the state, leading to resistance from

certain ideological groups. This misunderstanding stems from the perception that religious moderation is a foreign or Western ideological construct imposed onto local contexts, rather than a concept rooted in the community's own religious traditions (Mahmudah et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, state intervention in promoting religious moderation is frequently perceived as an attempt to control religious expression, resulting in tensions between state policies and religious freedom (Cholil, 2022). A top-down approach without grassroots involvement tends to produce only a shallow understanding of religious moderation, confined to normative discourse and disconnected from daily practice (Chotimah et al., 2025).

This resistance is not merely theoretical—it often materializes in the form of open rejection of state programs or passive withdrawal from interfaith dialogue platforms. Some ideological groups even perceive religious moderation programs as threats to their exclusive beliefs, viewing them as state tools designed to suppress certain religious expressions (Mahmudah et al., 2025). To address these challenges, a more contextual and participatory approach is needed—such as strengthening value-based education on tolerance in schools and designing inclusive policies that go beyond normative frameworks to engage with the spiritual and social experiences of communities (Rusmana et al., 2025). In doing so, religious moderation can be more widely accepted as an authentic expression of local religious values, rather than being seen merely as a tool of state control.

Second, in practice, programs promoting religious moderation often remain elitist and symbolic, failing to directly engage with community-level actors. The top-down approach, dominated by professionals or state actors, frequently creates a disconnect between policymakers and the actual needs of the people. In a broader context, studies on moderation models show that moderation efforts are often implemented by professional moderators or algorithmic systems, which lack a deep understanding of local values and community dynamics (Seering, 2020; Tran et al., 2024). This condition is also reflected in performative approaches commonly seen in online communities, where moderation activities emphasize visual order and public image rather than fostering genuine community participation (Cai et al., 2021).

Beyond the digital realm, similar challenges arise in community-based health and development programs, where initiatives designed by external actors often fail to involve communities authentically, resulting in low levels of trust and participation (Delea et al., 2024; McNeish et al., 2022). These dynamics affirm that symbolic moderation models without genuine community engagement merely reinforce unequal power relations and widen the gap between policy design and social realities. Other studies also indicate that overly controlling and incentive-based moderation styles are less preferred by communities, which tend to value relational and norm-based approaches (Matzat & Rooks, 2014). Therefore, the urgency to develop participatory, contextual, and community-responsive models of religious moderation becomes increasingly evident (South & Phillips, 2014; Steiner & Farmer, 2018).

Third, at the global level, a gap persists between Indonesia's discourse on religious moderation and realities on the ground. Although Indonesia actively promotes religious moderation through educational programs, civil servant training, and intergovernmental diplomacy (Dewi et al., 2025; Untung et al., 2025), many discriminatory practices against religious minority groups remain unresolved. Reports indicate that violations of human rights—particularly the right to freedom of religion or belief—still occur through discriminatory regulations and the state's failure to protect its citizens from religion-based violence (Colbran, 2010). For instance, anti-Ahmadiyah regulations have proliferated across several regions in Indonesia without significant social pressure, indicating the state's central role in enabling such discrimination (Buehler, 2013). This issue is exacerbated by the influence of radical groups on government policies and by ideological structures such as *Pancasila*, which allow the state to privilege certain religions over others (Mu'ti & Burhani, 2019; Sumaktoyo, 2020).

Fourth, the participation of other countries in international forums on religious moderation—such as ICROM 2023—often remains ceremonial and has not yet translated into meaningful policy integration. Many countries only participate through delegations or paper submissions, without developing concrete follow-up programs in their domestic policies (Cholil, 2022). On the other hand, successful practices, such as those implemented in Salatiga, show that policies promoting tolerance can indeed work, although challenges in bridging gaps between majority and minority religions persist (Ma'arif et al., 2024). Therefore, Indonesia must focus on internal policy consolidation—by reforming discriminatory regulations and strengthening human rights protections—to ensure that religious moderation gains global moral credibility. At the international level, more substantial network-building is essential through inter-institutional cooperation, knowledge exchange, and integration of moderation values into the legal and educational systems of partner nations. Only through these means can religious moderation flourish as an embedded value system rather than a mere diplomatic slogan.

In response to the dysfunctions identified in the implementation of religious moderation, several transformative and sustainable action plans are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of this policy at both national and global levels. First, the government must adopt a more participatory and community-based approach. This means that religious moderation programs should not be designed and disseminated solely by bureaucratic elites or formal religious figures, but must include grassroots actors such as interfaith youth, minority communities, civil society organizations, and local educational networks. A concrete step would be the establishment of regionally based *religious moderation forums* that are deliberative and inclusive—not only responding to issues of intolerance but also functioning as learning hubs for contextualized tolerance values.

Second, the government must reform policies and regulations that discriminate against religious minority groups. This includes revising or repealing local and national regulations that violate the principle of religious freedom, as well as strengthening legal instruments that protect minority rights. The central government must also clarify the boundary between the state's role as a facilitator of harmony and as an interpreter of religious doctrine, to avoid suspicion that religious moderation serves as a tool of ideological control.

Third, religious moderation programs must move beyond symbolic and ceremonial spaces and become mainstreamed into sectoral policies such as education, media, and social development. The curriculum on moderation should be adapted to local contexts and go beyond doctrinal content to include applied learning through participatory methods and case studies of local diversity. In the media sector, it is essential to build a digital ecosystem that supports inclusive narratives, backed by policies that promote digital religious literacy and counter-narratives against extremism.

Fourth, at the international level, Indonesia must consolidate its intergovernmental diplomacy networks through policy partnerships, sharing best practices, and advocating for values-based multilateralism. Religious moderation should not be positioned as a state doctrine, but rather as an ethical principle across faiths and cultures that can be negotiated and adopted according to each country's needs. Indonesia can facilitate this through active participation in forums such as ASEAN, the OIC, and international human rights bodies, advocating for the integration of moderation values into global peacebuilding and sustainable development agendas. With such action plans addressing local, national, and global dimensions, religious moderation can grow into a living and contextual value system—capable of being applied adaptively in an era of complex and transnational challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious moderation is not merely a normative discourse but a socio-political strategy capable of responding to the challenges of religious diversity and the threat of extremism at national, regional, and global levels. By examining the implementation of religious moderation policies by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs and the responses from ASEAN countries and the broader international community, this study finds that religious moderation holds significant potential as an instrument of value diplomacy and peacebuilding. Amid rising identity polarization, intolerance, and religion-based violence, the approach of religious moderation has proven effective in opening spaces for dialogue, strengthening social cohesion, and advancing religious values within a framework of universal humanity. Nevertheless, its effectiveness still faces internal challenges, such as ideological resistance, the gap between policy and practice, and ongoing discrimination against minority groups.

Scientifically, this research offers an important contribution to expanding the understanding of religious moderation as a public policy that can be ethically and strategically exported into global spaces, particularly within the pluralistic context of ASEAN. This study presents a methodological approach based on policy studies and document analysis, mapping out the dynamics of policy adoption, resistance, and the potential for replication beyond Indonesia. Furthermore, the research introduces an interpretive model that highlights the historical, social, and ideological dimensions of religious moderation policy while constructing a critical framework to reflect on the dysfunctions embedded within it.

However, this study also acknowledges several limitations. First, the primary data are limited to official documents and reports, without fieldwork that could capture direct community responses. Second, the study emphasizes normative and policy contexts, and thus does not fully explore the sociological and psychological dimensions of grassroots acceptance of religious moderation. Future research should complement this study through ethnographic approaches, cross-national surveys, or broader comparative studies in order to provide a

more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the dynamics of acceptance and transformation of religious moderation as a global policy framework.

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