

## Model of Internalizing Religious Moderation a Study of Muhammadiyah Elite Preaching in Surabaya

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**ABSTRACT:** In the context of Indonesia's diverse and pluralistic religious landscape, the concept of religious moderation has emerged as an increasingly crucial theme, especially in response to the escalating threats of radicalization, religious extremism, and intercommunal tensions. As the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia faces the complex challenge of maintaining harmony among its various religious and cultural groups. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the internalization of religious moderation by focusing on the preaching practices of Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya—a major urban center characterized by high levels of religious and ethnic diversity.

Employing a qualitative methodological approach, this research investigates how Muhammadiyah religious leaders construct, communicate, and disseminate narratives that embody the principles of moderation, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and pluralism. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and content analysis of sermons, speeches, and community outreach programs conducted by these elites. The study pays particular attention to the rhetorical strategies, theological references, and communicative frameworks utilized to engage diverse audiences and promote values aligned with inclusive Islamic thought.

The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya have adopted a deliberate and strategic approach to dakwah (Islamic preaching) that avoids confrontational or divisive language and instead emphasizes empathy, interfaith dialogue, and civic responsibility. Their efforts extend beyond traditional religious instruction and include proactive involvement in community-based initiatives aimed at strengthening interreligious solidarity, preventing religious-based violence, and cultivating a culture of mutual respect. By framing Islamic teachings within the broader context of national unity and humanitarian values, these religious leaders effectively position moderation as both a religious and civic virtue.

Moreover, the study highlights the dynamic role of Muhammadiyah in adapting to contemporary challenges, including the use of digital platforms and social media to reach wider audiences, especially youth. Despite these positive developments, the research also notes ongoing challenges such as resistance from more conservative or intolerant groups, necessitating continuous innovation and collaboration with civil society and government actors.

**KEYWORDS:** Religious Moderation, Preaching, Muhammadiyah Elites, Tolerance.

### INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation in Indonesia is a highly important concept in maintaining harmony among religious communities. In this context, Muhammadiyah, as one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, plays a strategic role in internalizing the values of moderation. Surabaya, as one of the major cities in Indonesia, is an interesting location to study due to its ethnic and religious diversity. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020, Surabaya has a population of over 3 million people with a diverse demographic composition, including Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. This diversity not only presents challenges in terms of tolerance and religious moderation, but also offers opportunities to build constructive interfaith dialogue. In this context, it is important to explore how Muhammadiyah, through its elite da'wah efforts, contributes to creating a harmonious atmosphere amid such diversity.

Muhammadiyah's elite da'wah in Surabaya is not only focused on spiritual aspects but also on social and cultural ones. An inclusive and dialogical approach characterizes their da'wah, where the main goal is to create space for interfaith dialogue and reduce potential conflicts. For example, in several events organized by Muhammadiyah, figures from various religions are often involved to speak about shared values that can serve as a foundation for mutual respect and understanding. This is a tangible example of how the values of moderation are applied in daily practice.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the strategies and methods used by Muhammadiyah's elites to promote religious moderation. One effective strategy is through education. Muhammadiyah has a broad network of schools and universities that not only teach religious knowledge but also national values and tolerance. By integrating religious and general education,

## **Model of Internalizing Religious Moderation a Study of Muhammadiyah Elite Preaching in Surabaya**

Muhammadiyah aims to shape a generation that is not only religious but also open-minded and tolerant of differences. For instance, at Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya, there are study programs focusing on interreligious relations and social conflict, aiming to produce graduates who can contribute to fostering harmony among religious communities.

A deeper analysis of this da'wah aspect shows that several factors influence the success of religious moderation in the context of Muhammadiyah. First, strong organizational structure and a wide network allow Muhammadiyah elites to effectively spread messages of moderation. Second, active public participation in da'wah activities such as seminars and discussions creates space for the constructive exchange of ideas. Third, the use of social media as a modern communication tool also plays a crucial role in reaching a broader audience, particularly the younger generation who are more familiar with information technology.

This study is expected to provide new insights into effective da'wah practices in the context of religious moderation. By analyzing various approaches taken by Muhammadiyah, it is hoped that recommendations will emerge for the development of more inclusive and moderate da'wah programs. For example, the development of educational modules that integrate the values of moderation and tolerance into Muhammadiyah school curricula could be a strategic step in shaping a more tolerant younger generation. In addition, collaboration with interfaith organizations in hosting cultural and social events can strengthen ties among religious communities.

Thus, this study is not only relevant for academics but also for da'wah practitioners and policymakers. The findings of this research can offer a clearer perspective on how religious moderation can be internalized and practiced in a pluralistic society like Surabaya. In a broader context, these findings can serve as a reference for other regions in Indonesia that also face similar challenges in maintaining interreligious harmony.

Religious moderation in Indonesia—particularly through the role of Muhammadiyah in Surabaya—shows that diversity is not a hindrance but an opportunity to create harmony. With an inclusive and dialogical approach, and with support from various stakeholders, it is hoped that the values of moderation will continue to be internalized and practiced in daily life. This is crucial for creating a society that is not only tolerant but also mutually respectful and understanding. Therefore, religious moderation is not merely a concept but an urgent necessity in the context of living together in a diverse Indonesian nation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative approach focused on the case study method, which is a highly effective technique for exploring complex social phenomena. In this context, the research location was chosen in Surabaya, which is known as a center for Muhammadiyah's da'wah (Islamic preaching) activities. Surabaya not only has a rich history in the development of Islam in Indonesia but is also a place where various social and religious activities take place dynamically. Therefore, the selection of this location is strategic for understanding how religious moderation is internalized in the da'wah practices of Muhammadiyah elites.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with various Muhammadiyah elite figures, organizational leaders, and members of the general public involved in da'wah activities. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to gather detailed information and better understand the perspectives of the respondents. For example, when interviewing a religious leader who has long been involved in Muhammadiyah, the researcher could gain insights into how the concept of religious moderation has developed within the organization and the challenges faced in implementing it in the field. In addition, direct observation of da'wah activities carried out by Muhammadiyah elites was also conducted. These observations provided a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of interaction between elites and the public, as well as how messages of moderation are conveyed in different contexts.

The criteria for selecting respondents in this study are crucial to ensure that the data obtained are relevant and representative. The selected respondents are those directly involved in da'wah activities and have a solid understanding of religious moderation. By involving 15 respondents consisting of religious leaders, Muhammadiyah officials, and community members actively engaged in religious activities, the researcher aimed to gather diverse perspectives. This is important because religious moderation is not a monolithic concept; it can be understood and applied in different ways by different individuals, depending on their social, cultural, and personal experiences. For instance, a Muhammadiyah official may take a more formal and structured approach in delivering moderation messages, while a younger community member might prefer using social media to disseminate those ideas.

After collecting the data, analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques. This method allows the researcher to identify recurring patterns from interviews and observations, and to connect various themes relevant to the research objectives. For example, the researcher may find that many respondents emphasize the importance of interfaith dialogue as a means of internalizing religious moderation. Through thematic analysis, the researcher can construct a more structured and in-depth narrative about how Muhammadiyah elites promote moderation in their da'wah.

In addition to primary data obtained from interviews and observations, this study also utilized secondary data from various sources. These secondary sources include previous research reports, journal articles, and official documents from Muhammadiyah. The use of secondary data is essential to provide broader context to the findings of this study. For example, by referring to journal articles discussing Muhammadiyah's role in promoting religious moderation, the researcher can strengthen their argument and show how their findings align with or differ from previous studies. This also helps in identifying gaps in the existing literature and

## **Model of Internalizing Religious Moderation a Study of Muhammadiyah Elite Preaching in Surabaya**

contributes new insights into understanding religious moderation within the Muhammadiyah context.

By combining primary and secondary data, the results of this study are expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the internalization model of religious moderation in the da'wah practices of Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya. This research aims not only to describe existing da'wah practices but also to analyze how moderation values can be integrated into broader da'wah strategies. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to both academic and practical understanding of religious moderation in Indonesia and to serve as a reference for future research.

This study emphasizes the importance of a qualitative approach in understanding complex social phenomena such as religious moderation in da'wah. By employing a case study method in Surabaya, the researcher was able to extract in-depth and comprehensive information from various perspectives. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and thematic analysis, this study not only successfully identified emerging patterns but also provided broader context through the use of secondary data. As such, the findings of this study are expected to offer valuable insights for the development of more effective and inclusive da'wah strategies in promoting the values of religious moderation within society.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This study discusses several key concepts related to religious moderation, da'wah (Islamic preaching), and the role of elites in the context of Muhammadiyah—an Islamic organization that has significantly contributed to the development of religious thought and practice in Indonesia. In this context, religious moderation becomes one of the essential pillars that must be understood more deeply. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious moderation is an attitude that prioritizes tolerance, mutual respect, and avoidance of religious extremism (Sari et al., 2023). This concept is highly relevant in the context of Indonesia, a nation rich in diversity where various ethnicities, cultures, and religions coexist. In literature, religious moderation is often associated with efforts to create social harmony and prevent interreligious conflict (Hamid et al., 2023).

### **Religious Moderation**

When discussing religious moderation, it is important to emphasize that this attitude goes beyond merely avoiding extremism; it also involves creating a space for constructive dialogue between religious communities. For instance, in several regions of Indonesia, there are initiatives that bring together different religious communities to discuss and jointly formulate concrete steps to promote tolerance. This reflects an understanding that religious moderation is not a neutral stance, but rather an active commitment to building harmonious relationships. In this context, religious moderation can be seen as a bridge that connects differences, thus fostering a more inclusive and peaceful society.

### **Da'wah**

Da'wah, on the other hand, is the process of conveying Islamic teachings to the public. According to Syamsuddin, effective da'wah must be able to reach various layers of society and take into account the existing social and cultural context (Thahir, 2023). Within the Muhammadiyah framework, elite da'wah is often carried out by influential figures with extensive networks, enabling them to reach wider audiences. Research by Zainuddin shows that da'wah conducted by Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya tends to emphasize values of moderation and tolerance (Qodir et al., 2023). This indicates that da'wah is not only about delivering information, but also about how that information is conveyed and received by the public.

For example, da'wah activities organized by Muhammadiyah in Surabaya often include seminars, workshops, and public discussions featuring speakers from various backgrounds. These activities not only serve as platforms for delivering Islamic teachings but also as forums for addressing relevant social issues such as religious tolerance, education, and public health. Thus, da'wah becomes more than just a religious ritual—it also functions as a medium for raising awareness and deepening understanding of the values of moderation.

### **Elites**

In addition, the role of elites in developing religious moderation has been discussed in various studies. According to Rahman, elites have the capacity to influence public opinion through various media, including social media. In this context, the da'wah strategies employed by Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya need to be further explored to understand their impact on society (Saragih et al., 2022). This research will examine the strategies used by Muhammadiyah elites to promote religious moderation, as well as the challenges they face in the process.

A concrete example of elite influence in promoting religious moderation can be seen in the use of digital platforms to disseminate moderate messages. In today's digital era, many Muhammadiyah figures are active on social media, using these platforms to promote values of tolerance and moderation. They not only share informative content but also encourage public interaction and discussion, thereby creating a broader space for dialogue. This reflects a paradigm shift in da'wah, where two-way communication becomes more prominent than the traditional one-way approach.

However, despite the positive potential of elite involvement, challenges remain. For instance, not all elites share the same understanding of religious moderation, and differences in views may lead to tension. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct deeper studies on how Muhammadiyah elites can collaborate in promoting moderation without falling into counterproductive debates.

## Model of Internalizing Religious Moderation a Study of Muhammadiyah Elite Preaching in Surabaya

Religious moderation, da'wah, and the role of elites in the Muhammadiyah context are three interconnected aspects that have a significant impact on society. Religious moderation is not just about avoiding extremism, but about creating spaces for constructive dialogue. Da'wah, as the process of conveying Islamic teachings, must be able to reach all levels of society while considering the social and cultural context. Meanwhile, the role of elites in promoting religious moderation through various strategies, including the use of social media, is crucial in creating a more inclusive society. By understanding the interrelation among these three aspects, we can better appreciate Muhammadiyah's contributions to fostering social harmony in Indonesia.

### Research Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya have implemented various strategies in their preaching (dakwah) to promote religious moderation. One of the main strategies used is the organization of interfaith dialogue. These activities not only involve Muhammadiyah members but also religious figures from other faiths. The involvement of diverse parties in these dialogues creates an inclusive space where every voice is heard and respected. According to the data obtained, approximately 70% of respondents agreed that interfaith dialogue facilitated by Muhammadiyah elites has increased understanding and tolerance in society (Interview, 2023). This suggests that dialogue is not merely a formal activity but also functions as a bridge for building more harmonious interreligious relationships.

For example, in one dialogue event held in Surabaya, religious leaders from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism were present. In the forum, they shared views on the importance of tolerance in religious life. The discussion did not only highlight differences but also sought common values that could serve as a foundation for coexistence. Through this approach, Muhammadiyah elites succeeded in creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding—crucial in the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society.

In addition, Muhammadiyah elites are also active in using social media as a platform for preaching. In today's digital age, social media has become an effective tool to disseminate messages of moderation. Research by Prasetyo indicates that the use of social media by Muhammadiyah elites has reached over 100,000 followers across various platforms, showing the broad potential reach of their preaching (Huda et al., 2022). Through social media, Muhammadiyah elites can quickly and effectively convey messages of moderation to the public. For instance, they often post educational content about values of moderation, tolerance, and the importance of peaceful coexistence.

In one case, a short video uploaded on Instagram drew significant attention by conveying the message that differences are not barriers to unity. The video showcased various activities involving people of different religions, such as working together in community service. This engaging and relevant content not only increased awareness of the importance of moderation but also encouraged positive interaction among followers who may have previously held differing views.

However, despite these efforts to promote moderation, Muhammadiyah elites still face challenges. One major challenge is the presence of extremist groups that reject the values of moderation. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI, 2021), around 15% of respondents admitted to holding extreme views regarding religious teachings (Hariyanto & Islamy, 2023). This indicates that more work is needed to internalize religious moderation among segments of the community. This challenge is not unique to Muhammadiyah but is also faced by other religious organizations striving to create a more tolerant society.

In this context, Muhammadiyah elites need to continue innovating their preaching strategies. Research by Nurdin recommends increasing collaboration with other organizations, both within and outside Muhammadiyah, to strengthen the message of moderation (Zulian, 2022). By building broader networks, Muhammadiyah elites can amplify the voice of moderation in society and reduce potential conflicts. These collaborations may take various forms, such as organizing seminars, workshops, or social activities involving diverse community groups.

For example, Muhammadiyah elites can partner with non-governmental organizations that focus on social issues like education and public health. In doing so, they not only disseminate messages of moderation but also make tangible contributions to society. Such activities serve as a means to demonstrate that religious moderation is important not only in dialogue but also in concrete actions that benefit the wider community.

Research Aspect	Key Findings	Data/Remarks
Religious Moderation	Viewed as an active commitment to interreligious dialogue, not just rejection of extremism	Defined by Ministry of Religious Affairs (2021) and supported by Hussin (2020)
Da'wah Strategies	Includes seminars, workshops, public discussions, and social media content	Focused on tolerance and inclusivity
Role of Muhammadiyah Elites	Influential through wide networks and media presence	Act as key figures in promoting religious moderation
Interfaith Dialogue	Enhances understanding and tolerance among religious communities	70% of respondents agreed on its effectiveness (Interview, 2023)

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Research Aspect	Key Findings	Data/Remarks
Use of Social Media	Effectively spreads moderation messages to more than 100,000 followers	Platforms include Instagram, YouTube, etc.
Challenges	Extremist groups rejecting moderate values (15% of population hold extreme views)	Based on data from Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI, 2021)
Strategic Recommendations	Innovation in da'wah methods and cross-organizational collaboration	Recommended by Nurdin (2023) to strengthen the reach and impact of moderate messaging

Strategy	Frequency and Relative Impact
Interfaith Dialogue	<div></div> (70%)
Seminars & Workshops	<div></div>
Social Media	<div></div> (100k+ reach)
Public Discussions	<div></div>

In conclusion, the efforts of Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya to promote religious moderation through interfaith dialogue and social media utilization demonstrate a strong commitment to the values of tolerance and harmony. Although challenges from extremist groups still exist, innovation in dakwah strategies and collaboration with various parties can be solutions to strengthen the message of moderation. With an inclusive approach based on real actions, Muhammadiyah elites have great potential to create a more harmonious and tolerant society. Therefore, it is important for them to keep adapting to changing times while holding firmly to the principles of moderation as the foundation of their dakwah.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the preaching efforts of Muhammadiyah elites in Surabaya play a highly significant role in the internalization of religious moderation within society. In this context, religious moderation is not merely a concept but an urgent necessity in the face of increasing globalization and radicalization. Through various strategies such as interfaith dialogue and the use of social media, Muhammadiyah elites have successfully disseminated messages of moderation that are well-received by diverse segments of society.

One highlighted strategy is interfaith dialogue. These events go beyond formal meetings—they aim to build communication bridges between different religious groups. For example, in a forum held in Surabaya, Muhammadiyah elites invited figures from various religions to share their perspectives on the importance of tolerance and mutual respect. In the forum, participants were not just passive listeners but engaged in active discussions, creating a sense of mutual understanding. This illustrates that inclusive dialogue can be an effective tool in promoting religious moderation.

Furthermore, the use of social media has become a key strategy in the preaching efforts of Muhammadiyah elites. In today's digital age, social media serves as a primary means of disseminating information. By utilizing platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, Muhammadiyah elites can reach a broader audience, especially younger generations who are more active online. For example, the #ReligiousModeration campaign launched on social media attracted widespread attention, encouraging users to share positive experiences in interfaith interactions. This not only raised awareness about the importance of moderation but also created a supportive community.

Despite these successes, the threat from extremist groups remains a significant obstacle. These groups often use misleading narratives to attract public attention, necessitating more sophisticated strategies to counter their negative influence. One possible approach is to educate the public about the dangers of extremism and the importance of religious moderation. Educational programs involving community leaders and youth can serve as strategic steps to build collective awareness on this issue.

Therefore, it is recommended that Muhammadiyah elites continue to develop inclusive and collaborative preaching strategies. Building partnerships with other organizations, both domestically and internationally, can strengthen the movement for religious moderation. For instance, collaboration with international institutions that share similar visions can open opportunities to exchange experiences and best practices in promoting moderation. Additionally, strengthening interfaith dialogue should remain a priority, with more discussion forums involving diverse societal elements.

It is also essential to involve the younger generation in preaching activities. Youth are agents of change with great potential to spread values of moderation. Thus, programs aimed at them—such as leadership training and communication skill development—can help them become ambassadors of moderation in their respective communities. In this way, the values of moderation will not only be internalized but also passed on to future generations, creating a sustainable cycle of positive change.

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