

REEVALUATING APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS MODERATION AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL The Role of Muslim Youth in Advancing Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential role of Muslim youth as alternative partners in fostering religious moderation at the grassroots level. It identifies two central issues in current religious moderation policies: (1) an overemphasis on programs aimed at security and deradicalization, which overshadow initiatives that encourage harmonious inter- and intra-religious relationships, and (2) a predominantly top-down approach that limits grassroots participation, particularly among young people. These challenges expose gaps in policy strategies and highlight unequal public engagement in religious moderation efforts led by the government. Addressing these concerns, the study proposes alternative policy strategies that actively involve Muslim youth, who bring their own understanding of religious moderation cultivated through participation in various Islamic organizations and youth forums. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, incorporating data from in-depth interviews with students, academics, and activists; direct observations of interfaith dialogue groups and communities; and document analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in



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al-jāmi'ah
JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

ISSN: 0126-012X (p); 2338-557X (e)

Al-Jami'ah Research Centre, Yogyakarta - Indonesia

<https://aljamiah.or.id>

Semarang and Yogyakarta—cities renowned for their robust interfaith dialogue networks and advocacy in Indonesia. The paper ultimately argues that Muslim youth's active involvement in interfaith dialogue is a viable strategy to expand engagement at the grassroots level, especially among marginalized communities or those disadvantaged by hierarchical religious moderation policies.

[Tulisan ini mengkaji peran muda-mudi muslim sebagai mitra alternatif dalam implementasi moderasi beragama di tingkat akar rumput. Ada dua permasalahan yang perlu digarisbawahi terkait kebijakan moderasi beragama: 1) program yang berorientasi pada keamanan dan deradikalisasi lebih besar daripada upaya membangun keharmonisan hubungan antar/intra umat beragama dalam kebijakan moderasi beragama, 2) pendekatan top-down tidak mengakomodasi partisipasi dari bawah khususnya generasi muda. Kedua permasalahan ini menimbulkan kesenjangan antara strategi kebijakan dan respons masyarakat terhadap program moderasi beragama yang dilakukan pemerintah. Berangkat dari permasalahan tersebut, tulisan ini menawarkan alternatif strategi kebijakan yang melibatkan generasi muda, yang mempunyai definisi tersendiri mengenai moderasi beragama melalui keterlibatan mereka dalam beberapa organisasi Islam dan forum kepemudaan lainnya. Tulisan ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan data berupa hasil wawancara mendalam dengan mahasiswa, akademisi, dan aktivis; observasi langsung pada kelompok/komunitas dialog antaragama; dan analisis dokumen. Penelitian lapangan dilakukan di Semarang dan Yogyakarta, dua kota di Indonesia yang memiliki jaringan dan advokasi dialog antaragama yang baik. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan generasi muda dalam dialog antaragama dapat menjadi strategi alternatif untuk menjangkau lebih banyak komunitas di tingkat akar rumput, terutama kelompok masyarakat yang menyanggah status minoritas dan posisi yang tidak terfasilitasi akibat kebijakan moderasi beragama yang bersifat hierarkis.]

Keywords: religious moderation, policy strategies, youth, interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance

A. Introduction

In Indonesia, the implementation of religious moderation has faced significant critique, particularly from youth activists. The government's reliance on a top-down, legalistic framework—rooted in policies governing religious diversity since the 1970s—reflects a lack of responsiveness to the dynamic contributions of youth activism. In

contrast, civil society, particularly youth actors, have developed their own alternative strategies and approaches that merit greater recognition and integration into policy frameworks.¹ It is indicated that the Indonesian government, with its religious policies, prioritizes security and stability over the principles of equality and justice.² While state interests in managing religious diversity are also common in some countries, this sparks debate about the extent to which the state should intervene in the religious lives of its citizens and how citizens should ideally govern their own religious matters at the grassroots level.

The issues outlined above are a prelude to further analysis in this paper. In brief, Indonesia's governance of religious diversity has evolved from focusing on religious harmony to religious moderation. There is little difference between these two discourses, as the state remains dominant in regulating religion. The initial policy on religious harmony was a response to Muslim-Christian tensions in 1967.³ This dispute eventually led the state to employ a series of religious harmony policies under different Ministers of Religious Affairs.⁴ Meanwhile, the latter policy is a response to curb radicalism/extremism through inclusive religious teachings.⁵

Recent studies have analyzed religious governance in Indonesia.⁶

¹ Jamaludin Hadi Kusuma and Sulistiyono Susilo, "Intercultural and religious sensitivity among young Indonesian interfaith groups", *Religions*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2020), p. 26; Wasisto Jati et al., "From Intellectual to Advocacy Movement: Islamic Moderation, the Conservatives and the Shift of Interfaith Dialogue Campaign in Indonesia", *Ulumuna*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2022).

² Myengkyo Seo, *State Management of Religion in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2013); Nicola Colbran, "Realities and Challenges in Realising Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 5 (September 1, 2010): 678–704; Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia* (Springer, 2017); Sindung Haryanto, "Chapter 5 The Sociological Context of Religion in Indonesia" (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019), pp. 67–102.

³ Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened: Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

⁴ Abdul Rahman, "Interreligious Harmony as the Basis for Multiculturalism in Indonesia", *Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanities, and Social Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2023), pp. 208–10.

⁵ Lukman Saifudin, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kemenag, 2019).

⁶ Melissa Crouch, "Regulating places of worship in Indonesia: Upholding freedom of religion for religious minorities?", *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, July 2007 (2007), pp. 96–116; Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker, *Religion, Law and Intolerance in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2016); Pradana Boy Zulian and Hasnan Bachtiar, "Indonesia: A Complex Experience of Religious Diversity Governance", in *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 267–81; Asep Saepudin Jahar, *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2024 M/1445 H

First, religious harmony means harmonizing politics. The word “harmony” within religious harmony should be underscored in this regard. Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 on religious blasphemy misuse and prevention remains in place to regulate inter and intra-religious relationships, especially proselytization.⁷ It highlights the excessive role of the state in regulating religion and its biased stance on certain religious issues. This has been ingrained in the policy-making process, emphasizing religion promoting stability. Additionally, citizens identified as “penghayat kepercayaan” (native faith followers) still face unequal access to public services because they cannot indicate a recognized religious affiliation on their national identity cards.⁸ More importantly, their jurisdiction falls under the Ministry of Education and Culture rather than the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The government continues to classify native/indigenous faiths not as religions but as cultural products.

Secondly, religious moderation involves moderating practical understandings of religion. Religious moderation has become a main discourse among predominantly Muslim countries, pioneered by NGOs, to bridge religious diversity and achieve peace and justice.⁹ However, the Indonesian government has integrated religious moderation into its counterterrorism campaign. It is actually part of the national deradicalization program, initially led by the Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT) or National Counterterrorism Agency.¹⁰ It is now aligned with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and included in the National Medium Term Development Plan for 2020-2024. The problem arises when the concept of being “moderate” becomes

“Governing Religion in Indonesia and France: Scope and Limits”, *Ulumuna*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2018), pp. 1–33.

⁷ Trisno Sutanto, “Negara, Kekuasaan, & Agama: Membedah Politik Perukunan Rezim Orba”, in *Pluralisme Kewargaan: Arab Baru Politik Keragaman di Indonesia*, ed. by Zainal Bagir (Bandung: Mizan & CRCS UGM, 2011).

⁸ Cekli Setya Pratiwi, “Bridging the Gap between Cultural Relativism and Universality of Human Rights: Indonesia Attitudes”, *JILS*, vol. 5 (2020), p. 449; Faizal Risdianto, Sumarlam, and Riyadi Santosa, “Representation of Power in the News Text of the Inclusion of Indigenous Faiths on ID Card (e-KTP)”, *Nobel: Journal of Literature and Language Teaching*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2019), pp. 131–48.

⁹ Amany Lubis, “Moderasi Beragama: Konteks Global dan Antar Umat Beragama”, in *Konstruksi Moderasi Beragama*, ed. by Arief Subhan (Jakarta: PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021), p. 44.

¹⁰ Leonie Schmidt, “Aesthetics of Authority: ‘Islam Nusantara’ and Islamic ‘Radicalism’ in Indonesian Film and Social Media,” *Religion*, (2021), pp. 1–22.

Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level blurred, especially when used as a socio-legal instrument.¹¹ It divides people to be “moderates” and “radicals/extremists”.¹²

There are several research gaps in the discourse on the above-mentioned religious policy. First, the top-down implementation tends to benefit mainstream groups and is unfavorable to minorities, perpetuating stigma and prejudice in both inter- and intra-religious relationships. Second, the lack of genuine public participation in policy-making leads the public to seek alternative strategies for managing religious moderation and diversity on a large scale. This issue is particularly concerning for the younger generation, who are increasingly involved in religious moderation campaigns. Empirical cases show that young people, especially students, are prone to intolerant attitudes, which may, in turn, be pulling factors attracting them to religious moderation.

Following up on the policy reviews on religious moderation, three points should be emphasized: 1) the absence of mutual interreligious understandings makes religious moderation ineffective in engaging young people; 2) the implementation of religious moderation through government assistance tends to be normative, ceremonial, and elitist, as appointees are mostly from older generations; and 3) public aspirations remain unaccommodated in religious moderation programs. These obstacles lead young people to seek alternative religious moderation campaigns. Additionally, they are likely to propose religious moderation strategies that are more practical than conceptual. In brief, the state policy model does not effectively reach the grassroots level, while young people have already organized their campaigns.

In line with the three aforementioned problems, Muslims hold the majority position and play a pivotal role in determining the path of religious moderation in Indonesia. Recently, Muslim youth have increasingly engaged in a large number of interfaith dialogues.¹³ They

¹¹ Moch Nur Ichwan, “Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy,” *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn*, 2013, p. 60–104; Jeremy Menchik, “Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia,” *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2019), pp. 415–33.

¹² Wasisto Raharjo Jati, “Radicalism in the Perspective of Islamic-Populism: Trajectory of Political Islam in Indonesia”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2013), pp. 268–87; Ali Maksum et al., “Ideological Conflicts between Radical and Moderate Islamic Organizations in Indonesia”, *Journal of Talent Development and Excellence*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2020), pp. 2248–61.

¹³ Wasisto Jati et al., “From Intellectual to Advocacy Movement”.

have been concerned about the last polarization in public space.¹⁴ This paper aims to highlight the involvement of Muslim youths in religious moderation campaigns. A recent study demonstrates the eagerness of the younger generation to join interfaith dialogue communities to implement alternative religious moderation strategies.¹⁵ By focusing specifically on Muslim youth involvement, this paper seeks to demonstrate their significant role in driving the religious moderation movement within Islamic organizations and other forums. More importantly, the active presence of Muslim youth ensures that young people from diverse religious backgrounds continue to engage in interfaith dialogue activism.¹⁶

This research employs a qualitative method to understand Muslim youths' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions regarding their participation in interfaith dialogue. Data collection was primarily conducted through observations of targeted youth interfaith dialogue groups in Semarang and Yogyakarta during May 2023, along with interviews with informants, academics, interfaith youth activists, government representatives, and document analysis. This paper assumes that the young generation, led by Muslim youth, has already developed a practical religious moderation model through intensive interfaith dialogues and activism. More importantly, they aim to create an inclusive and egalitarian arena that attracts their peers to join.

B. Critical Review on Religion Policies Strategies in Indonesia

The relationship between religion and state governance in Indonesia is characterized by an ongoing effort to achieve equilibrium. This reflects Indonesia's unique identity as a predominantly Muslim nation with a rich multicultural and pluralistic heritage. This dynamic prompted Indonesia's founders to engage in extensive constitutional deliberations on reconciling secular principles with the management of religious faith. These debates ultimately culminated in the decision to avoid declaring Indonesia a religious state while simultaneously assigning religion a fundamental role in shaping the nation's moral and ethical framework. Informed by strong

¹⁴ Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Polarization of Indonesian Society during 2014-2020: Causes and Its Impacts toward Democracy", *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2022).

¹⁵ Wasisto Jati et al., "From Intellectual to Advocacy Movement: Islamic Moderation, the Conservatives and the Shift of Interfaith Dialogue Campaign in Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (2022).

¹⁶ Heru Prasetya and Hairus Salim, interview (27 May 2023).

secular interests within the policy-making domain, the government has historically sought to utilize religion and religious affairs as instruments for garnering regime support. Rather than enacting a complete separation between state and religion, secularism in Indonesia positions religion as a source of ethical guidance, influencing the formulation of public policies. This framework underscores the integration of religious ethics into a stability-oriented approach to governance, which has predominantly manifested in hierarchical, top-down religious policies aimed at regulating societal norms.

A significant incident that shaped this approach was a dispute over the establishment of a Methodist church in a predominantly Muslim region in 1967. This event triggered the state to formulate religious policy discourses in subsequent years. Rather than fostering mutual understanding, the government aimed to quell the conflict without resolving the underlying issues to maintain order and stability. This approach was designed to minimize any potential religious conflicts. However, state strategies were always ambiguous when delivering religious policies.¹⁷ On one hand, the state promotes freedom of religion as outlined in the Constitution. Meanwhile, the state often sides with majoritarian demands, seeking to keep social and informal forces under control to maintain stability. This dual approach reflects a complex balancing act between upholding constitutional rights and managing societal dynamics.¹⁸ This latter demand specifically focuses on religious propagation and the permissions required for establishing places of worship.¹⁹ Both issues have persisted across various tenures of the Minister of Religious Affairs. Recently, Indonesia has witnessed a significant rise in religious conflict, primarily due to protests against the establishment of worship places and perceived threats from proselytization.

This condition has resulted in unresolved interreligious conflicts at the grassroots level, highlighting the inadequacy of policy strategies in managing religious diversity effectively. While the implementation of religious policies remains ambivalent, it is crucial to analyze how

¹⁷ Paul Marshall, "The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2018), pp. 85–96.

¹⁸ Robert W. Hefner, "Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *Religions*, vol. 12, no. 6 (2021); Greg Fealy and Ronit Ricci, "Diversity and Its Discontents: An Overview of Minority-Majority Relations in Indonesia," *Contentious Belongings: The Pace of Minorities in Indonesia* (2019), pp. 1–18.

¹⁹ Robert W. Hefner, "Christians, Conflict, and Citizenship in Muslim-Majority Indonesia", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2017), pp. 91–101.

the state exercises security and legal approaches to manage religious diversity. Although security approaches have consistently been part of policy strategies and have often met with failure, the government still insists on using them in various religious policy discourses to this day. Therefore, the persistence of these policy strategies is worth further elaboration in this section.

1. *Religious Harmony Policies*

During the New Order era, the government introduced the “religious harmony” program to manage religious diversity. This program primarily relied on the involvement of leading figures from various religions within an interreligious forum. Supervised by the Minister of Religious Affairs, this forum underwent several name changes, starting as the “Konferensi Agama Lintas Agama” (Religion Conference on Interreligious Affairs) in the late 1970s and later renamed to the “Forum Dialog Lintas Agama” (Interfaith Dialogue Forum) in the mid-1980s.²⁰ The forum served as a communication bridge between the government and religious groups, as the government sought to incorporate religion into national development projects. This strategy required maintaining stability at the grassroots level by representing religious leaders. However, this indirect representation often resulted in the forums assuming a normative and ceremonial function, as they did not possess actual policy-making power. The interreligious forum, led by the government, tended to be more academic than advocative. It involved officials from Islamic state universities and representatives from various faiths to discuss and promote religious harmony. Despite its academic orientation, the forum was generally ineffective at managing daily interreligious interactions because it was primarily based in Jakarta, limiting its reach and influence. Nonetheless, it managed to resolve some religious friction issues, particularly those related to propagation and proselytization.

Under Minister Mukti Ali, the forum adopted the campaign phrase “agree in disagreement,” which encouraged adherents of different faiths to strengthen their own religious teachings rather than proselytize to others. This approach also emphasized that believers could cooperate despite differences in faith, fostering a spirit of tolerance

²⁰ Rahman, “Interreligious Harmony as the Basis for Multiculturalism in Indonesia”.

Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level and mutual respect.²¹ To consolidate religion into state management, Minister Munawir Sjadzali mandated that all religious organizations must take Pancasila (the Five Principles of National Ideology) as their foundational ideology. This initiative aimed to ensure that all religious organizations remained committed to the prevailing state system and ideologies. Prominent organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah eventually adopted Pancasila.

However, the interreligious forum could not annul the joint decree enacted by the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Religious Affairs in late 1969, which required public approval before constructing a new place of worship. This policy particularly affected Christians wanting to build churches in areas with Muslim majorities, as they often found themselves in the minority. The difficulty in building churches highlighted the ambiguous nature of religious policy management during the New Order. Fear of Christianization sometimes led Muslim communities to besiege proposed church sites. This often prompted the government to take pragmatic steps, siding with the majority to maintain order and stability. Notably, the interfaith dialogue was largely confined to academic forums and lacked a significant presence in the public sphere. The issue of worship place permissions, especially for non-Muslims, persisted beyond the New Order era.

In the post-New Order era, a religious forum initiated by the regime continued. The newly formed “Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama” (FKUB) (Inter-religious Harmony Forum), established under the Joint Decree of the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 8 and 9/2006, marked a departure from previous forums. Unlike its predecessors, FKUB is more decentralized, operating at the sub-national level, particularly in provinces and municipalities. The forum appoints representatives of recognized religions through public recommendations rather than exclusively from academic circles. More importantly, FKUB wields more influence in advising the government on religious issues, a significant shift from the earlier forums that mainly produced discourses.

Despite its improved status, FKUB seems to follow the same pattern as its predecessors during the New Order era. The membership of the forum remains elitist, accommodating only leaders from recognized

²¹ Al Makin, “Not a Religious State,” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 46, no. 135 (2018), pp. 95–116.

religions,²² resulting in a generation gap issue when addressing religious friction or problems. While this approach might solve some religious conflicts partially, the factors mentioned above generally reflect the overall pattern of FKUB's performance at the sub-national level. The role of mayors and regents is crucial in guiding the implementation of religious harmony through FKUB in their respective regions.²³

In short, the implementation of religious harmony from the New Order to the early post-New Order era showed partial success in managing religious diversity. As a discourse, religious harmony succeeded in achieving consensus on issues like propagation and proselytization through intensive dialogue among religious leaders. However, as a policy, religious harmony failed to resolve the long-standing issue of “permission for a new place of worship,” a problem that still persists.²⁴ The policy strategies that relied on indirect representation through forums have proven ineffective in bringing public aspirations into the policy-making process.²⁵

2. *Religious Moderation Policies*

With regard to religious moderation, there are multiple interpretations rather than a single, unified understanding of what constitutes moderation. After the emergence of ISIS and its affiliates gained prominence in the Muslim world around 2014, some moderate Islamic organizations began to develop and promote their own brands of moderation to distinguish themselves and counter extremist narratives.²⁶ For example, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) launched “*Islam Nusantara*” [Islam of the Archipelago] in 2015 in response to those extremism threats.²⁷ At

²² Jeanny Dhewayani, “Managing Religious Diversity in Indonesia: Policy and Reality”, in *Religion, Public Policy, and Social Transformation in Southeast Asia*, vol. 1, ed. by Dicky Sofjan (Geneva: Globethics.net Focus 33, 2016), pp. 71–99.

²³ Mujiburrahman, “State Policies on Religious Diversity in Indonesia,” *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2008).

²⁴ Melissa Crouch, “The Inter-Religious Harmony Forum, the Ombudsman, and the State: Resolving Church Permit Disputes in Indonesia?”, *Religious Diversity in Muslim-majority States in Southeast Asia* (2014), pp. 114–5.

²⁵ Dicky Sofjan, *Religion, Public Policy and Social Transformation in Southeast Asia - Managing Religious Diversity* (2016), p. 89.

²⁶ Serafettin Pektas, “A Comparative Analysis of Three Sunni Muslim Organizations on ‘Moderate’ and ‘Radical’ Islam in Egypt, Morocco and Indonesia,” *Religion*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2021), p. 190.

²⁷ Wasisto Raharjo Jati and Ihsan Yilmaz, “The Recent Traditionalist Turn in Indonesian Islam after Conservatives: How its Engagement towards Urban Muslims”,

the same time, the newly elected Indonesian government under Joko Widodo faced a rising wave of Islamism in the public sphere, which had the potential to delegitimize his administration. This situation eventually led to a political alliance between the government and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as NU traditionally upholds the Sunni tradition of legitimizing governmental authority.²⁸ This resulted in religious moderation policies that likely adopt NU's discourses, including moderate thought, movement, and action.²⁹ However, the implementation of these policies is unequal due to focusing on formal rather than non-formal activities.

Consequently, religious moderation efforts have struggled to fully resonate with the public, particularly with young people. The religious moderation policy is part of the National Mid-Term Development Plan (2020-2024), which emphasizes adopting moderate values in daily religious practices. It also stresses a commitment to maintaining a “middle” path, avoiding the extremes of both the left (secularism/liberalism) and the right (radicalism/jihadism).³⁰ This approach has been in progress since 2015 under Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin. It is based on four primary principles: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of religious traditions.³¹ These four principles essentially reflect the diversity among Indonesians. Religious moderation officially became a part of national policy in 2020, followed by a series of regulations such as Presidential Regulation 86/2020 and the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs 18/2020. These regulations positioned the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the leading institution responsible for coordinating the socialization of religious moderation. Previously, religious moderation was managed by two agencies: the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) in 2014 and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2015. Both agencies emphasized deradicalization as the primary strategy for religious moderation through re-education and re-socialization. Although the focus has since shifted from deradicalization to moderation teachings, this has created a social

Analisa Journal of Social Science and Religion, vol. 8, no. 2 (2023), pp. 156–73.

²⁸ Andree Feillard, “Traditionalist Islam and the State in Indonesia”, *Islam in an Era of Nation States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia* (1997), p. 130.

²⁹ Umi Musyarrofah and Zulhannan, “Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama’s Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0”, *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2023), p. 423.

³⁰ Nur Kafid, *Moderasi Beragama: Reproduksi Kultur Keberagamaan Moderat di Kalangan Generasi Muda Muslim* (Jakarta: Elex Media Komputindo, 2023).

³¹ Saifudin, *Moderasi Beragama*.

label for those who either support or oppose involvement in religious moderation efforts.³²

As a policy discourse, the religious moderation program is designed to encourage inclusivity in the understanding and practice of religion. It is important to note that religious moderation does not aim to revise the substance of religious beliefs but rather to moderate practical religious attitudes, particularly in the public sphere. These objectives specifically address current trends of intolerant practices, such as banning the construction of worship places for other religions, persecuting Muslims from different branches of teaching, and displaying unwelcoming attitudes toward people of different faiths within the same community.³³

However, there are some critical points regarding the recent implementation of religious moderation. First, there is concern about the excessive role of the state in attempting to discipline the public mindset to be “moderate” through the religious moderation program.³⁴ Moreover, the government aims to ensure that the public becomes law-abiding citizens, avoiding both extremism and liberalism, by promoting religious moderation. This approach is somewhat reminiscent of the deradicalization program that targeted former terrorists and their affiliates. Consequently, people may be reluctant to embrace religious moderation out of fear of being stigmatized. This concern is compounded by the ongoing debate over the definitions of extremism and liberalism, as religious moderation policies have not incorporated public participation, particularly through interfaith dialogue.

Secondly, the continued reliance on top-down policy strategies emphasizes social order rather than fostering mutual religious understanding. The government has involved multiple ministries and officials under the Ministry of Religious Affairs in implementing these policies. However, this strategy has confused, especially among facilitators tasked with teaching the principles of religious moderation to the public, as the provided modules are often too conceptual and lack practical, empirical examples.³⁵ Third, there remains majority-minority logic behind

³² Zainal Abidin Bagir and Jimmy Sormin, *Politik Moderasi dan Kebebasan Beragama; Suatu Tinjauan Kritis* (Jakarta: Elex Media Komputindo, 2022), pp. 47–52.

³³ Wasisto Jati, “The Religious Moderation for Indonesia Muslim Middle Class: Challenges & Solutions,” *Penamas*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2023), pp. 18–34.

³⁴ Zainal Abidin Bagir et al., “Limitations to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia: Norms and Practices,” *Religion & Human Rights*, vol. 15, no. 1–2 (2020), p. 48.

³⁵ Hamam Samidi and Irfan Helmi, interview (24 May 2023).

Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level the operationalization of FKUB to implement religious moderation,³⁶ resulting in minorities still inferior in this forum.

In a nutshell, the government has consistently favored top-down approaches to governing religious diversity in Indonesia. From religious harmony to religious moderation, this approach illustrates how the government manages religions primarily to maintain stability and order. The policy strategy relies heavily on the role of religious leaders to execute the government's agenda. As a result, there is a lack of equality in both inter- and intra-religious relationships as the government continues to consider the majority-minority dynamic in its decision-making.³⁷ Additionally, there is limited freedom of religion for the public, as the government continues to pay little attention to native religions in religious forums. This neglect further marginalizes the latter and restricts their representation and participation in discussions on religious matters.³⁸ This ambiguous religious policy has resulted in a divided society, intensifying friction between majority and minority groups.

C. The Youths' Perspective on Religious Moderation Policies

The bottom line of the above-mentioned sections is that there are significant gaps between young people and the government regarding religious moderation. The government's approach tends to focus on ordinary dialogue forums with selected representatives from different religions, facilitated by the "Kantor Kesatuan Bangsa & Politik" (National and Political Unity Agency) at the local government level. These forums typically surface during religious holidays or public disputes that highlight issues related to religious identities in society. This reactive approach contrasts with the ideal principle of religious moderation, which should be preventive.

This method is insufficient for monitoring interreligious affairs on a daily basis and, as a result, fails to effectively reach the grassroots level. Additionally, there are growing concerns about intolerant attitudes among students, particularly at the secondary school level. These intolerant attitudes include alarming practices such as suicidal terrorist bombings and suspected affiliations with extremist organizations. The root of

³⁶ Ihsan Ali Fauzi, "Disputes over Places of Worship in Indonesia: Evaluating the Role of the Interreligious Harmony Forum", *Contentious Belonging: The Place of Minorities in Indonesia*, ed. by Greg Fealy and Ronit Ricci (2019), pp. 185–91.

³⁷ Fealy and Ricci, "Diversity and its Discontents".

³⁸ Dhewayani, "Managing Religious Diversity in Indonesia".

these problems lies in the educational system, as many studies suggest that radical ideologies have infiltrated the current teaching methods.³⁹ For example, some textbooks have included extremist teachings, promoting concepts such as bombings, martyrdom, and jihad in a way that can encourage radicalization.⁴⁰ These words illustrate how intolerant stances have significantly influenced both teachers and students, many of whom may be inclined to support the idea of a caliphate and align with hardline groups.⁴¹ In response to this condition, young people have attempted to counteract these influences by intensifying dialogues that emphasize religious diversity. This strategy largely relies on the frequency and reach of postings on social media platforms.⁴² More specifically, counter-narratives on social media have been actively used to address intolerant views. These intolerant perspectives often stem from religious understandings that are symbolic and formalistic, largely due to the influence of strict religious teachings.⁴³ Therefore, some young people are vulnerable to radical extremist thoughts.⁴⁴

These two concerns have ultimately motivated young people to participate in religious moderation campaigns. For young people,

³⁹ Syamsul Arifin, "Islamic Religious Education and Radicalism in Indonesia: Strategy of de-Radicalization through Strengthening the Living Values Education," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2016), pp. 93–126; Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafism, Knowledge Production"; Mun'im Sirry, "Muslim Student Radicalism and Self-Deradicalization in Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2020), pp. 241–60.

⁴⁰ Didin Syafruddin and Ismatu Ropi (eds.), *Gen Z: Kegagalan Identitas Keagamaan* (Jakarta: PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2018), p. 98.

⁴¹ Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, *Api Dalam Sekam: Keberagaman Muslim Gen-Z: Survei Nasional tentang Keberagaman di Sekolah dan Universitas di Indonesia* (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2018), p. 29.

⁴² Merlyna Lim, "From Activist Media to Algorithmic Politics: The Internet, Social Media, and Civil Society in Southeast Asia," in *Routledge Handbook of Civil and Uncivil Society in Southeast Asia* (Routledge, 2023), pp. 25–44; Merlyna Lim, "Freedom to Hate: Social Media, Algorithmic Enclaves, and the Rise of Tribal Nationalism in Indonesia," *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2017), pp. 411–27; Lim, "From Activist Media"; Lim, "Radical Islamism in Indonesia".

⁴³ Dirga Maulana, "The Exclusivism of Religion Teachers: Intolerance and Radicalism in Indonesian Public Schools", *Studia Islamika*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2017), pp. 395–401; Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulema Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam", *TRANS: Trans-Regional and-National Studies of Southeast Asia*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2020), pp. 21–35.

⁴⁴ Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Critical Analysis of Islamic Populism: Insights from Indonesian Perspectives", *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2024), pp. 27–48.

religious moderation is simply defined as the ability of individuals from different religious backgrounds to come together and resonate on the same wavelength.⁴⁵ They have their own understandings and practices for implementing religious moderation, often shaped by their experiences with diversity—whether through family upbringing or their social environment. These factors primarily influence young people to embrace religious moderation. The youth movement toward religious moderation is not opposed to state policy; rather, it aims to make religious moderation more relatable and accepted among their peers. Instead of engaging in intensive forum discussions, young people tend to take a more empirical approach to implementing religious moderation. This approach allows them to swiftly reach out to their peers without significant constraints.

In line with the above explanations, the religious moderation strategies developed among young people include 1) interfaith dialogue and 2) interfaith activism. Both strategies have been thoroughly explored in the cases of Yogyakarta and Semarang. The first strategy encourages mutual understanding in inter- and intra-religious contexts. Meanwhile, the second strategy involves advocacy works led by Muslim youths to address religious issues. These approaches reflect a proactive and engaged form of religious moderation that resonates with the younger generation.

D. The Mapping of Muslim Youths' Expression on Religious Moderation Campaign: Semarang and Yogyakarta Cases

The Muslim youths are the primary research subjects in this paper. Their involvement in the interfaith dialogue movement extends beyond specific Islamic organizations to include other forums and organizations as well. The significant number of Muslim youths participating in these activities ensures the continuity of interfaith initiatives and encourages participation from young people of different religious backgrounds.

In terms of Islamic organizations, Gusdurian—which consists of those who admire and continue the late K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's advocacy on pluralism and interfaith dialogue—plays a significant role in managing religious moderation at the grassroots level through active

⁴⁵ Ihsan Yilmaz, “Young Muslims in the Anglosphere and Expression of Faith”, in *Islam in the Anglosphere: Perspectives of Young Muslims in Australia, the UK and the USA* (Springer, 2023), pp. 129–61; Ihsan Yilmaz and Galib Bashirov, “Religious Homophily and Friendship: Socialisation between Muslim Minority and Anglo Majority Youth in Australia”, *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 26, no. 6 (2023), pp. 768–85.

Muslim youth involvement. This organization has an extensive network and advocacy presence in both Semarang and Yogyakarta. Gusdurian youth members are part of a broader network that shares a commitment to pluralism and interfaith dialogue. For example, Pelita in Semarang has successfully attracted the youth wing of Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI) to join the religious moderation campaign, while Gusdurian Yogyakarta actively runs the “Kelas Penggerak Gusdurian” (KPG) [Gusdurian Activists Classes], consistently producing young alumni who engage in interfaith and interreligious affairs in their respective regions.

In other forums and organizations, Muslim youth have become active participants across various platforms. In Yogyakarta, Muslim youths are involved in academic forums such as CRCS/ICRS (Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies/Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies) and Sekolah Lintas Iman (Interfaith Schools), as well as advocacy forums like FPUB (Forum Persaudaraan Umat Beriman) and Srikandi Lintas Iman. Meanwhile, in Semarang, Muslim youth actively engage with several NGOs, including LBH Semarang (Legal Aid Institute Semarang) and eLSA Semarang (Lembaga Studi Agama dan Sosial).

Their involvement in non-Islamic affiliated organizations demonstrates that Muslim youth can serve as alternative partners in spreading the spirit of peace and pluralism at the grassroots level. This cross-affiliation also reflects their commitment to promoting religious moderation beyond their own religious communities.

1. *Semarang Case*

In general, Semarang is a coastal city that has historically been engaged with external influences due to trading activities. It has become a melting pot of migrants and natives who have settled there for many years. Therefore, it has affected the attitudes and behaviors of Semarang's people for many generations. More specifically, it has influenced how they welcome differences and identity diversity.⁴⁶ Semarang is one of the top ten tolerant cities in Indonesia, with a score of 5.717. It also has a good score on the religious harmony index, with a rating of 7.55 out of 10. These facts indicate that Semarang has inclusive and healthy interreligious relationships. Furthermore, this commitment to inclusiveness was

⁴⁶ Dian Ramadhani, “A Closer Look at the Attitude of Religious Moderation in the Millennial Generation: Forms & Concepts of Strengthening and Their Implementation,” *Annual International Conference on Islamic Education for Students*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2023).

Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level formalized in the Watugong Charter, signed by various religious leaders on October 10, 2020.⁴⁷ This charter outlined three main points: 1) strengthening Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the 1945 Constitution, and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia; 2) strengthening religious moderation and belief in God Almighty; and 3) strengthening the spirit of national tolerance.

Although Semarang has an inclusive and diverse social condition, it has encountered conservative infiltration through campuses. In the mid-2010s, several conservative youth groups actively recruited students.⁴⁸ Campus mosques then became centers for these movements. However, this situation has changed since the succession of student executive boards.⁴⁹ It pushed the conservatives out of the campus environment. Another past issue was the public protest against the new Indonesia Baptist Church building, where people were concerned about proselytization. This issue was resolved due to the active involvement of Muslim youth in supporting the permit for the church building. The Muslim youth interfaith activists were problem solvers for this sensitive issue, which the local state apparatus was unable to resolve.

These two recent incidents have been major concerns for Muslim youths to reinvigorate religious moderation. More specifically, they want to continue to nurture the Watugong spirit among their peers through interfaith forums.⁵⁰ There is an interreligious network driven by young activists that facilitates this forum. In general, it is coordinated by PELITA (Interreligious Brotherhood), which is able to cooperate with various religious groups in Semarang. These include Jemaat Ahmadiyah Semarang, LBH Semarang, eLSA Semarang, the Gusdurian Community Semarang branch, the Institute of Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), the Peace Hub Community, and MATAKIN Semarang. The forum is called “Pondok Damai” (Peace Cottages) and runs annually.⁵¹ This program uses interfaith dialogue as its main strategy to engage young participants in sharing their past experiences with different believers. It is designed to curb prejudices and stigma among young people by facilitating multilateral, intensive conversations about different religions.

⁴⁷ Taslim Syahlan, interview (23 May 2023).

⁴⁸ Hendra Ardianto and Muhammad Adnan, interview (22 May 2023).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Wawan Budi, interview (22 May 2023).

⁵¹ Syafira Anisa, “Pondok Damai: A Study of Pelita Interfaith Association Movement for Interreligious Engagement in Indonesia”, *Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2022), pp. 143–66.

This strategy aligns with the current challenges faced by young people, which are to be not only open but also accepting of differences. Such a stance requires a courageous spirit to meet, gather, and act together. It is important to note that peer-to-peer factors play a major role in encouraging many young people to get involved in interfaith forums.⁵² This is similar to a marketing strategy that recruits people to become “agents.” After this stage, they are able to advocate for religious issues and even broader humanitarian problems.

For interfaith youth activism, PELITA also serves as the coordinator. The coordinator, Wawan Setiawan Budi, revealed that regular interfaith programs are underway, such as advocacy for religious minorities, security assistance for certain religious celebrations, and cross-religious prayer events. These activities usually receive traditional support from the FKUB Central Java branch, especially its youth wing, Gema FKUB. The emergence of Gema FKUB was an initiative by FKUB leadership under Kyai Haji Taslim Syahlan to involve more young people in tolerance-building. PELITA, along with Gema, not only focuses on religious issues but also provides humanitarian aid for flood victims in Semarang.⁵³ These activities help strengthen religious moderation values by prioritizing human values and universal peace.

In a broader context, the pattern of youth interfaith activism in Semarang involves a large network that includes not only religious organizations but also other actors such as NGOs and media. It is important to note that dealing with religious issues can be particularly sensitive for young interfaith activists. This concern necessitates support from other organizations for publication and backup. PELITA coordinates with other institutions that also interact with each other. ELSA and LBH provide legal support and assistance for religious dispute issues. Meanwhile, several youth organizations such as Gusdurian, PMII, GMKI, and HMI contribute human resources, especially students, for interfaith activism. The media covers news regarding interfaith activities, particularly through online platforms and local newspapers.

In summary, the interfaith activism network in Semarang demonstrates the eagerness of Muslim youths to preserve religious moderation through interfaith dialogue. PELITA plays a crucial role as

⁵² Ihsan Yilmaz, “Muslim Secularism by Conduct: Attitudes of Young Australian Muslims to Legal Pluralism and Sharia”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2023), pp. 274–88.

⁵³ Nuhab Mujtaba and Imam Fadhillah, interview (23 May 2023).

the coordinator for interfaith dialogue and activism, connecting various youth religious organizations to establish “Pondok Damai” and facilitate intensive meetings and dialogues. This approach is key to nurturing tolerance and inclusiveness among young people. More importantly, the local FKUB’s innovation through its youth wing, Gema FKUB, illustrates how religious leaders should engage with young people to promote government programs on religious moderation in the public space. Gema FKUB, alongside PELITA, is coordinating to attract many young people to participate in interfaith dialogue. Interfaith youth activism certainly requires more actors to maintain tolerant interreligious relationships in Semarang. Furthermore, it demands not only material assistance but also a long-standing commitment to peace.

2. *Yogyakarta Case*

Yogyakarta has been a pioneering city that promotes religious moderation in Indonesia. Prominent religious scholars and activists have conducted their work in this city, including YB Mangunwijaya (Christian Catholic), TH Sumartana (Christian Protestant), Gregorius Utomo (Christian Protestant), Ahmad Syafi Ma’arif (Islam), and Sri Pannavaro Mahatera (Buddhist). In addition to these figures, Yogyakarta hosts several NGOs focused on interfaith dialogue. Some institutions draw inspiration from these figures to carry forward their values to the next generation. For example, Dian Interfidei Institute, the Institute for Islamic and Social Studies (LKIS), Vihara Karangjati, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, and the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) at UGM remain active in promoting interfaith dialogue among young people through their own methods.

On the interfaith activism front, the city also has the Yogyakarta Interfaith Brotherhood Forum (FPUB), founded on March 24, 1997. This forum was established in response to the potential growth of identity conflicts in public spaces. Especially during the 2000s, as Indonesia transitioned from authoritarianism to democracy, there was an escalation of religious and ethnic tensions that fueled conflicts across the country.⁵⁴ Concerning these matters, all the religious leaders agreed to set up the

⁵⁴ Jae Bong Park, “Managing Socio-Economic Crisis in Indonesia: The Role of Interfaith Civic Organisations in Yogyakarta during the 1998 Economic Crisis,” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 40, no. 116 (2012), pp. 39–58.

FPUB to curb religious conflict and advocate for minorities.⁵⁵ Recently, FPUB has not been as active as it was during the 2000s and 2010s due to regeneration issues. Despite having strong roots in religious moderation, Yogyakarta is currently facing a rise in Islamic conservatism. For example, groups such as Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), Front Jihad Islam (FJI), and Forum Umat Islam (FUI) oppose the idea of pluralism.⁵⁶ Several intolerant incidents have occurred in public spaces, indicating that religious moderation is formally recognized but not substantially embraced by society.

In response to these concerns, the involvement of young people, led by Muslim youths, in various interfaith activities plays a crucial role in Yogyakarta. This involvement addresses issues of regeneration and declining interfaith activities within predecessor organizations. Previously, interfaith activities were centered around prominent figures, which gained national attention. Although many of these leading figures have passed away, young people remain interested in interfaith issues. Their thoughts and values on pluralism continue to be nurtured among grassroots communities and NGOs. Currently, interfaith activities have developed several programs to attract more young people.

The eagerness of young people in Yogyakarta to engage in both interfaith dialogue and activism can be analyzed through several factors across different platforms. One key factor is the idolization of late religious leaders, such as those associated with the Gusdurian National Networking, headquartered in Yogyakarta. Gusdurian activists, inspired by the late KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), focus on the contextualization and indigenization of Islam and universal humanism. They have summarized his ideas into nine principal values: monotheism, humanity, justice, equality, liberation, brotherhood, simplicity, chivalry, and traditional wisdom.⁵⁷ These nine values subsequently become core teaching points in the interfaith class series called *Kelas Penggerak Gusdurian*, which actively recruits young people who are either students or early-career professionals.⁵⁸ Both segments hold strategic importance

⁵⁵ Aina Dyah Muji Tristian, *Kiprah Forum Persaudaraan Umat Beriman (FPUB) Yogyakarta Tahun (1997-2018)* (Yogyakarta: Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University, 2022).

⁵⁶ Muhammad Najib Azca, Hakimul Ikhwan, and Zaki Arrobi, "A Tale of Two Royal Cities: The Narratives of Islamists' Intolerance in Yogyakarta and Solo," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*; vol. 57, no. 1 (2019), p. 34.

⁵⁷ Prasetya and Salim, interview (27 May 2023).

⁵⁸ Mochamad Sodik and B.J. Sujibto, "The NU's Youth Among the Radical Movements in Yogyakarta," in *Proceedings of the 1st Annual International Conference on Social*

Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level for spreading tolerance and pluralism among their peers. In addition to Gusdurian, the Dian Interfidei Institution also co-organizes the Sekolah Lintas Iman series annually with Duta Wacana Christian University and Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University. For Dian Interfidei, organizing Sekolah Lintas Iman is a way to nurture Sumartana's legacy values, such as inclusiveness, openness, and tolerance.

Secondly, joining interfaith activities as a means of self-truth seeking and inner peace is another factor. Vihara Karangjati routinely organizes interfaith meditation sessions that attract many young people, especially students. This meditation encourages young people from different religious affiliations to strengthen their spirituality through self-dialogue.⁵⁹ This is important to curb egoism.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community (YIPC) regularly organizes the Interfaith Peace Camp for young people, especially Muslim youths. Through this camp, participants are encouraged to have the courage to engage in dialogue on sensitive religious matters that are not typically addressed in conventional interfaith dialogue methods.⁶¹ As usual, interfaith dialogues, especially those organized by the government or FKUB, often only address surface-level issues and fail to delve into basic matters considered taboo for discussion. However, the results obtained from Muslim youths who are members of YIPC show a willingness to accept all groups involved in dialogue. They use a method called Scriptural Reasoning, where participants read holy or authoritative texts from their respective religions and then discuss specific issues. Although the issues discussed can be sensitive, they continue to engage in these conversations. The process involves alternating readings from one's own religion and texts from other religions. The results of reading and discussing both one's own and others' religious texts form the basis for their dialogue. Ultimately, this practice helps participants find inner peace and self-healing by gaining a deeper understanding of their own religion and the values of others.

Third, involving an interfaith community as a means to advocate non-religious issues is another important factor. An example of this is the emergence of Srikandi Lintas Iman (Srili), an interfaith women-based community dedicated to promoting interfaith dialogue and collaboration

Sciences and Humanities (AICOSH 2019) (Atlantis Press, 2019), pp. 19–24.

⁵⁹ Aditya Kristanto, interview (26 May 2023).

⁶⁰ Totok Tejamano, interview (19 May 2022).

⁶¹ Ahmad Shalahuddin, interview (26 May 2023).

to strengthen peacebuilding and diversity in Indonesia. The young people who join Srili are motivated to break social stigma and foster cordial friendships with individuals from different faiths.⁶² Visiting churches or other places of worship can be forbidden for some Muslims and is considered taboo and sensitive in society due to concerns about proselytization. However, this challenge does not deter their involvement with Srili in fostering interreligious relationships. Currently, Srili focuses on training preschool teachers to instill a spirit of peace and tolerance in toddlers.

Fourth, re-educating tolerance and peace values through interfaith courses is another key approach. Bumi Cendekia is one of the leading institutions in this regard. It is designed to develop an understanding of diversity by combining classical religious teachings with modern social approaches. Most importantly, this educational institution aims to promote Gus Dur's tolerant ideas.⁶³ This educational institution targets Muslim youths, especially high school students. They have the opportunity to study at Bumi Cendekia and gain knowledge about tolerance and respect for human values, combining teachings from classical religious texts with ideas from contemporary thinkers referenced by the institution.

In summary, the sustainable interfaith dialogue led by Muslim youths in Yogyakarta demonstrates creative strategies for fostering religious moderation in the public space. The established and new interfaith organizations and communities, such as Srili and Bumi Cendekia, are ideologically connected with Gusdurian and Dian Interfidei. Meanwhile, YIPC has ties with CRCS UGM, and FPUB occasionally connects with FKUB to secure state support. This series of interfaith activities also highlights the state's limited capacity to engage with young people effectively. Most importantly, current religious moderation efforts do not address youth aspirations related to self-truth seeking, inner peace, and critical religious thinking. This should serve as a lesson for state officials to reconsider their approach to religious moderation.

E. Concluding Remarks

The relationship between the state and religions in Indonesia appears asymmetrical, with the interests of the state frequently taking precedence over those of religions. The state employs hierarchical, top-

⁶² Wiwin S.A. Rohmawati, interview (17 May 2022).

⁶³ Prasetya and Salim, interview (27 May 2023).

down mechanisms to regulate religious practices under the pretext of maintaining stability and social order. Initiatives such as religious harmony and religious moderation are predominantly implemented through elitist and symbolic strategies, often channeled via indirect interreligious platforms such as the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB). These approaches have consequently hindered the development of authentic interreligious and intrareligious dialogue among adherents of different faiths. Furthermore, the lack of inclusive participation, particularly from younger generations, remains a critical limitation of current religious moderation efforts, thereby marginalizing this demographic.

In light of the insufficient space provided by formal religious moderation frameworks, youth, led primarily by Muslim youth, have increasingly taken the initiative to engage with various interfaith institutions and communities. To address this gap, the government should actively integrate these grassroots initiatives, enabling greater participation of Muslim youth in collaborative religious moderation programs through innovative and inclusive approaches. Additionally, financial support through donor-funded schemes is indispensable for sustaining interfaith activities spearheaded by Muslim youth, as financial constraints often impede the execution of dialogue and advocacy efforts. Such support could significantly enhance the efficacy of religious moderation initiatives the Ministry of Religious Affairs oversees.

In conclusion, this study underscores the imperative for the state to reevaluate its policy strategies to render religious moderation programs more accessible and acceptable to the broader public. Incorporating a greater number of youth and positioning them as key partners in policy-making could provide a promising pathway for fostering common ground between the state and religion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was funded by the Research Organization for Social Sciences and Humanities, BRIN, Indonesia. Initial drafts of the research were presented in person at the 4th International Symposium of Religious Literature Heritage (ISLAGE), organized by UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2023, and the Annual International Conference on Islamic Studies (AICIS) 2024 at UIN Walisongo Semarang. The authors are grateful to all stakeholders involved in this research project.

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