

LIVED RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND MUSLIM WOMEN'S AGENCY: An Indonesian Experience

Fauziah Nasution & Suparni

Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan
Jl. T. Rizal Nurdin No. km. 4.5, Sumatera Utara 22733, Indonesia
e-mail: fauziahnst@uinsyahada.ac.id, suparni@uinsyahada.ac.id

Farhani Azkia

Universitas PTIQ Jakarta
Jl. Batan 1 No. 2, RT.2/RW.2, Lebak Bulus, Jakarta 12440, Indonesia
Email: farhaniazkia@mhs.ptiq.ac.id

Abdulroman Mahir

Jamia Islam Sheikh Daud Al-Fathani
Mueang Yala District, Yala 95000, Thailand
e-mail: romanmahae@gmail.com

Abstract: This community-based qualitative study examines the role of Muslim women in strengthening religious moderation as a lived social practice within a Muslim minority community in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Data were collected through participant observations, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with Muslim women actively involved in majelis taklim and other community religious activities. The findings reveal that participants initially experienced limited understanding of religious moderation, social pressures associated with living in a multi-religious environment, and restricted access to gender-responsive religious education. Through community-based empowerment processes, women gradually reinterpreted religious moderation as a social and ethical responsibility rather than merely a formal religious obligation. As such they transformed into religious agency emerged as informal religious authority, acting as family educators, social mediators, and promoters of harmony. The originality of this study lies in conceptualizing religious moderation as a lived social practices negotiated through everyday experiences. This new perspective contributes to discussions on lived religion, women's religious agency, and community-based empowerment while highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive religious education in strengthening social cohesion.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Muslim Women, Lived Religion, Community-Based Empowerment.

Corresponding Author	Fauziah Nasution			
Article history	Submitted: January 23, 2026	Revision : June 2, 2026	Accepted : June 28, 2026	Published : June 30, 2026
How to cite this article	Nasution, Fauziah, Suparni, Farhani Azkia and Abdulroman Mahir. "LIVED RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND MUSLIM WOMEN'S AGENCY: An Indonesian Experience." <i>Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies</i> 10, no. 1 (2026): 58 - 96. http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v10i1.28410			

Introduction

Religious moderation has become a major topic in contemporary Indonesian society, particularly in communities characterized by religious diversity and increasing interaction among people of different faiths. Conceptually, religious moderation emphasizes balance, tolerance, justice, and peaceful coexistence without compromising one's religious commitments.¹ In Indonesia, the discourse on religious moderation has expanded significantly through government policies and the strengthening of religious institutional frameworks in response to growing concerns over religious exclusivism, polarization, and potential social fragmentation. Several recent studies have demonstrated that policy initiatives, educational programs, and religious institutions play important roles in promoting moderate religious narratives and maintaining social cohesion in a plural society.² Some studies have touched the topic from traditions and local wisdoms perspectives.³

However, despite the increasing prominence of religious moderation in policy and institutional discussions, its manifestation in everyday social life remains uneven and insufficiently explored. Existing scholarship has paid relatively limited attention to how religious moderation is understood, practiced, and transmitted through daily interactions within families and local communities.⁴

At the micro-social level, families and local communities constitute the primary environments where religious values are learned, practiced, negotiated, and reproduced.⁵ Within these settings, women occupy a particularly significant position. As mothers, caregivers, and informal educators, Muslim women contribute substantially to shaping religious beliefs, moral orientations, and social relationships across generations.⁶ Through everyday interactions, women often become the first agents responsible for transmitting religious values, cultivating ethical behavior, and fostering attitudes toward social diversity.

Nevertheless, women's contributions to promoting religious moderation frequently remain underrecognized in formal religious discourse and policy frameworks, which continue to place religious authority predominantly within male-dominated institutions and leadership structures.⁷ Contemporary scholarship on gender and religion has increasingly emphasized that women's religious engagement should not be viewed merely as an expression of personal piety but also as a form of social and moral agency that actively shapes community values, social relations, and collective identities.⁸

In Indonesia, community-based religious forums such as *majelis taklim* have become important spaces where women engage in religious learning and social interaction.⁹ These forums function not only as sites for religious education but also as arenas in which participants discuss, interpret, and negotiate values related to tolerance, coexistence, mutual respect, and everyday ethics. Previous studies have shown that women's participation in informal religious learning groups contributes to the development of moral leadership within families and communities, strengthens social solidarity, and encourages more inclusive religious attitudes.¹⁰ Such findings indicate that women possess considerable potential to become agents of religious moderation through their everyday religious practices and social engagement.

However, the existing literature reveals several important limitations. First, studies on religious moderation in Indonesia have predominantly focused on macro-level dimensions,¹¹ including government policies,¹² religious institutions,¹³ educational curricula,¹⁴ and theological discourse.¹⁵ While these studies have provided valuable insights into the institutional promotion of moderation, they have paid less attention to how moderation is experienced and enacted in everyday life. Second, research on women's participation in religious communities has largely been conducted in Muslim-

majority settings, where religious identity is socially dominant and relatively uncontested.¹⁶

Consequently, the experiences of Muslim women living in minority contexts where religious identity is continuously negotiated through daily interactions with members of other faiths remain insufficiently understood. Third, although the growing field of lived religion has highlighted the importance of examining religion as it is practiced in everyday settings,¹⁷ relatively few studies have explored how women's lived religious experiences contribute to the construction and transmission of religious moderation within minority Muslim communities. As a result, the intersection of women's religious agency, lived religion, and religious moderation remains underexplored in the Indonesian context.

This gap is particularly important because minority religious settings often involve more intensive interreligious encounters and require ongoing negotiation of identity, belonging, and social relationships. In such contexts, religious moderation is not merely a normative concept promoted by institutions but a practical social strategy embedded in everyday interactions. Understanding how women navigate these realities is therefore essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of religious moderation as a lived social phenomenon.

This issue is especially relevant in South Tapanuli Regency, an area characterized by varying patterns of religious diversity across its districts. Although Muslims constitute the majority population in the regency as a whole, the demographic composition differs considerably from one district to another. Population data from 2025 indicate that several districts have substantial Christian populations, creating diverse social environments in which interreligious interaction forms an integral part of everyday life (see Table 1).

Table 1. Population Composition by Religion in South Tapanuli Regency, in 2025

Districts	Islam (%)	Protestant Christians (%)	Catholicism (%)	Other Religions (%)
Aek Bilah	88,5	8,5	2,0	1,0
West Angkola	91,0	6,5	1,5	1,0
Angkola Sangkunur	87,5	9,5	2,0	1,0
South Angkola	92,5	5,0	1,5	1,0
East Angkola	91,5	6,0	1,5	1,0
Arse	85,5	11,5	2,0	1,0
Batang Angkola	89,5	8,0	1,5	1,0
Batang Toru	76,0	17,5	4,5	2,0
Marancar	82,5	13,5	3,0	1,0
Muara Batang Toru	78,5	15,5	4,0	2,0
Saipar Dolok Hole	80,5	14,5	3,0	2,0
Sayur Matinggi	89,0	8,5	1,5	1,0
Sipirok	83,5	12,5	3,0	1,0
Tano Tombangan Angkola	69,0	23,0	6,0	2,0

Source: South Tapanuli Central Statistics Agency, 2025
www.tapanuliselatankab.bps.go.id

As shown in Table 1, Tano Tombangan Angkola District has the highest level of religious diversity among the sub-districts in South Tapanuli Regency. By 2025, the proportion of Muslims in the sub-district will be below 90%, while the Protestant and Catholic populations are a significant part of the demographic structure.¹⁸ This situation puts Muslims in a position where

they do not have complete control over the structure, so that the interaction between different religions becomes a continuous and intense social reality.

Panindoan Village, administratively located in Tano Tombangan Angkola District, offers a unique social context for studying the dynamics of religious moderation.¹⁹ Overall, the Christian population accounts for 77%, while Islam accounts for 23%.²⁰ This demographic structure positions Muslims as a religious minority and creates a social environment where religious identity is continuously negotiated through everyday interactions in families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and community organizations.

For Muslim women in Panindoan Village, these circumstances present both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, they face limitations in accessing religious education that adequately addresses the realities of living as a minority community. On the other hand, they play strategic roles in maintaining religious values within their families while simultaneously fostering harmonious relationships with individuals from different religious backgrounds.²¹ Through their participation in religious learning activities, community engagement programs, and daily social interactions, women often become key actors in sustaining social cohesion and cultivating attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect.

Against this background, the present study seeks to address three interconnected gaps in the literature. First, it shifts the focus of religious moderation research from policy and institutional frameworks to everyday religious practices. Second, it examines the experiences of Muslim women in a minority context, an area that remains relatively neglected in existing scholarship. Third, it employs the perspective of lived religion to explore how religious moderation is practiced, negotiated, and transmitted through women's daily activities and social relationships. By integrating these perspectives, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of religious moderation

as a lived social process rather than merely a policy discourse or theological ideal.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore religious moderation as a socially embedded practice by examining the role of Muslim women in Panindoan Village, a minority Muslim community in South Tapanuli Regency. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: *First*, What challenges do Muslim women face in understanding and practicing religious moderation within a minority-community context?. *Second*, How does community-based empowerment strengthen women's informal religious agency and authority?. *Third*, What impacts does women's empowerment have on family resilience and interreligious social harmony?

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in community engagement to explore how Muslim women develop and exercise religious agency in strengthening religious moderation at the community level.²² A community-engagement approach was selected because it enables researchers to examine religious moderation as a lived social practice that is continuously negotiated through everyday interactions, rather than merely as a normative discourse or institutional policy.

The study was conducted in Panindoan Village, North Sumatra, a predominantly Muslim village situated within a broader administrative area where Muslims constitute a minority group.²³ A total of 20 participants were purposively selected based on their active involvement in religious activities, their roles within family and community life, and their willingness to participate in the study. The majelis taklim serves as a community-based religious learning forum where women regularly engage in religious study, discussion, and social activities. This participant group enabled the researchers to explore diverse experiences related to ethical reasoning, religious identity negotiation, and everyday practices of social coexistence.

The community-engagement process was conducted through several stages. First, preliminary observations and informal conversations were carried out to identify participants' experiences and challenges related to religious moderation. Second, collaborative discussions were organized to explore local perspectives on interreligious relations and women's roles in maintaining social harmony. Third, reflective religious dialogues and group-learning activities were conducted to facilitate collective reflection and knowledge sharing. Finally, follow-up discussions and reflections were undertaken to examine participants' experiences and perceived changes resulting from the engagement process. Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and triangulation. These included participant observation during religious gatherings, group discussions, reflective religious dialogues, and in-depth interviews.²⁴ Participant observation enabled the researchers to directly observe how religious values, moral reasoning, and moderation were discussed and practiced within everyday religious activities. Group discussions focused on collective perceptions and negotiation processes among participants, while in-depth interviews captured individual narratives regarding changing perspectives, confidence, religious understanding, and social experiences following participation in community-based empowerment activities.²⁵

Data were analyzed using a thematic-reflective approach. The analysis followed several stages. First, interview transcripts, field notes, and discussion records were reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful segments of data were inductively coded to identify recurring patterns and significant experiences. Third, related codes were grouped into broader themes concerning women's religious agency, empowerment processes, and practices of religious moderation. Fourth, the themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to participants' lived experiences and the broader

socio-religious context. Finally, the themes were organized into an analytical narrative that addressed the research questions and reflected the participants' perspectives.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. All participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study before providing their consent to participate. Participant confidentiality was maintained through data anonymization and the removal of identifying information. Consistent with the principles of community engagement, this study adopted a non-extractive and reciprocal approach, ensuring that participants benefited directly from their involvement through enhanced religious literacy, opportunities for collective reflection, and strengthened capacities as moral agents within their families and communities.²⁶

Results and Discussion

This section presents empirical findings from research collected through in-depth interviews and group discussions with Muslim women in Panindoan village. The study's results show participants' experiences, understanding, and changes in perspective regarding religious moderation, empowerment, and the role of women in carrying out religious beliefs within the context of interfaith community life. The findings are organized into several key themes that directly answer the research questions.

Challenges in Understanding and Practicing Religious Moderation

The first findings showed that the participants faced various difficulties in understanding and practicing the concept of religious moderation. At first, religious moderation was often seen as a set of external rules tied to state narratives or the guidelines of religious institutions, rather than as ethical guidelines for everyday life. Some participants noted that religious moderation

is often presented in abstract, theoretical terms, making it difficult to apply in daily religious practice within a family or community.

Some women explained that at first, they understood religious moderation as “following the rules” or “maintaining a balance of religious obligations,” without connecting it to issues such as ethics, social relations, or interfaith life. This limited understanding is especially experienced by women who previously had limited access to gender-responsive religious education and have never participated in community-based religious discussion forums.

These findings indicate that participants were familiar with the discourse of religious moderation, yet their understanding remained largely normative and institutional. Religious moderation had not yet been fully internalized as a practical framework for navigating everyday social relationships and interfaith interactions.

Another challenge that arises is related to the social context of Panindogan Village, which is located in an area where Muslims are a minority group. Although the majority of the villagers are Muslim, the village is administratively and geographically located within a multi-religious community. The participants explained that interactions across religions are common in daily life, so they must maintain a balance between their religious commitments and tolerance for followers of other religions.

In such situations, women often act as mediators and guardians of social harmony, both in the family and in the surrounding community. However, this role is often not officially recognized and is performed without adequate religious knowledge or guidance.

This situation demonstrates that women carry significant social responsibilities in maintaining interreligious harmony despite having limited access to contextual religious education and empowerment opportunities.

Changing Understanding through Community-Based Empowerment

The second finding suggests that community-based empowerment programs play an important role in changing women's understanding of religious moderation. Through dialogue-based learning, group reflection, and experience-sharing, participants begin to understand religious moderation not just as a set of formal rules, but as a moral direction rooted in daily life and social responsibility.

Before joining the program, many women saw religious moderation as a personal practice linked to their own religious piety and rituals. However, after engaging in empowerment programs, they begin to see religious moderation as a social practice that requires active participation in building harmonious relationships, respecting differences, and maintaining peace in their neighbourhoods.

This change in understanding is clearly reflected in the statement of one of the following participants:

“At first, I thought moderation was just a matter of my relationship with God. Now I understand that moderation is also about how we live with others, especially with those of different religions. It is not just about worship, it is about attitude, mutual respect, and keeping the peace.”²⁷

This quotation illustrates a shift from an individual-centred understanding of religion toward a relational perspective that emphasizes coexistence, mutual respect, and social responsibility. The participant's reflection demonstrates how empowerment activities facilitated a deeper understanding of the social dimensions of religious moderation.

Activities that empower women, such as religious discussions and dialogue-based study circles, help them feel more confident in expressing their moral opinions. Participants said that shared

learning spaces gave them the courage to speak, ask questions, and interpret religious teachings in a way that suited the social realities they faced.

These findings suggest that empowerment programs function not only as educational spaces but also as transformative arenas where women develop critical reflection, self-confidence, and religious agency.

Empowerment as a Relational Process

The findings further show that women's empowerment occurs as a collective and relational process. Women do not change alone; they change through interaction and support from other community members. Learning together fosters a sense of solidarity and trust, thereby strengthening women's religious roles.

The participants explained that through group discussions, they were able to reflect on the challenges they faced, share experiences, and support one another in making moral decisions. This process encourages a shift in perspective, from viewing religious moderation as a personal responsibility to seeing it as a shared community responsibility.

One of the participants said: "Now I feel like moderation is not just about me and my faith. It is about us as citizens, understanding each other, and living peacefully together."²⁸

This statement demonstrates that empowerment strengthened participants' awareness of collective responsibility and social interconnectedness. Religious moderation was increasingly understood as a shared commitment aimed at preserving social harmony and peaceful coexistence.

These findings suggest that women's empowerment in the context of religious moderation is not a quick process but a continuous one that grows through social connections, dialogue, and reflection together.

The Daily Practice of Religious Moderation and Informal Authority

The latest findings suggest that women's empowerment encourages them to practice religious moderation by using informal religious authority in their daily lives. Without holding official positions in religious structures, women gain moral authority through their experiences, social relationships, and ethical integrity.

The participants began to apply their new understanding in the family context, for example, by guiding their children to respect religious differences. At the community level, women act as advisors and mediators in resolving social conflicts involving differences in beliefs.

One of the participants shared her experience: "I used to prefer to be silent. However, now I dare to help. There was a problem between Muslim and Christian neighbors, so I talked to both of them. We are determined to respect each other. Initially, I was not confident enough to do that."²⁹

This quotation demonstrates how empowerment translated into concrete social action. Increased confidence enabled women to act as mediators and bridge-builders in situations involving religious differences. Rather than remaining passive observers, they became active contributors to social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

These findings suggest that religious moderation is expressed through tangible actions in daily life. Women's religious agency is formed informally and plays a key role in maintaining social harmony at the local level.

The Following table summarizes the major themes emerging from the empirical findings and highlights their analytical significance in understanding women's religious agency and religious moderation.

Table 2. Summary of Empirical Findings and Analytical Significance

Theme Findings	Empirical Description	Analytical Meaning
The initial challenges of religious moderation	Moderation is understood as a normative and abstract concept; it is difficult to apply in everyday life.	Showing women's limited access to contextual religious education
The context of Muslim minorities	Women must balance religious identity and interfaith tolerance	Religious moderation is a practical necessity, not just a normative concept
Transformation through empowerment	Moderation is understood as a social practice and shared responsibility	Empowerment expands women's agency and reflective capacity
Relational empowerment	Solidarity and collective learning strengthen confidence	Religious agency is formed through social relations
Women's informal authority	Women are mediators and guardians of social harmony	Religious moderation is manifested through daily moral leadership

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a gradual transformation in women's understanding and practice of religious moderation. Participants moved from perceiving moderation as an abstract institutional concept to understanding it as a lived social practice expressed through dialogue, collective responsibility, and everyday moral action. This transformation provides the foundation for the following discussion, which situates the findings within broader theoretical debates on lived religion, women's religious agency, community-based empowerment, social capital, and everyday peace building.

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious moderation cannot be adequately understood solely as a theological ideal or

a state-sponsored policy agenda. Instead, religious moderation emerged as a lived social practice embedded in everyday interactions, moral reasoning, and community relationships. This finding is particularly evident in Panindoan Village, where Muslim women initially perceived religious moderation as an abstract concept associated with institutional discourse. However, through their participation in community-based religious activities, they gradually reinterpreted moderation as a practical ethical framework guiding interactions with family members, neighbors, and people of different religious backgrounds. This finding supports the perspective of lived religion, which argues that religion is not merely expressed through formal doctrines but is continuously constructed and negotiated through daily experiences and social practices.³⁰ The findings suggest that the effectiveness of religious moderation initiatives depends not only on policy dissemination but also on the extent to which these values become meaningful within the everyday realities of local communities.

The findings further reveal that the social context of Panindoan Village significantly shapes the practice of religious moderation. Although Muslims constitute the majority within the village, they live within a broader multi-religious environment where interactions with people of different faiths are unavoidable. Consequently, religious moderation is not experienced as a theoretical discourse but as a practical necessity for maintaining social harmony. Participants described how they continuously negotiated their religious commitments while fostering positive relationships with non-Muslim neighbors. This finding reinforces previous arguments that religious moderation is highly contextual and influenced by local socio-religious conditions.³¹ In this regard, moderation functions not merely as a normative principle but as a social strategy that enables communities to navigate religious diversity while preserving both religious identity and social cohesion.

A significant contribution of this study lies in its analysis of women's religious agency. Unlike perspectives that conceptualize agency primarily as resistance to religious structures, the findings demonstrate that women's agency develops through processes of reflection, learning, and reinterpretation of religious values.³² Participants did not challenge religious teachings; rather, they actively engaged with these teachings to make them relevant to the social realities they encountered. Through religious discussions, collective reflection, and community engagement, women developed greater confidence in expressing opinions, mediating conflicts, and promoting harmonious interreligious relations. These findings support Islamic feminist scholarship that emphasizes women's capacity as active interpreters of religious knowledge and moral actors within their communities.³³ The findings therefore challenge assumptions that Muslim women are passive recipients of religious norms and instead highlight their role as producers of religious meaning and social transformation.

The empowerment process identified in this study also extends existing empowerment theories. While empowerment is commonly understood as increasing access to resources, strengthening agency, and achieving desired outcomes,³⁴ the findings reveal the importance of relational and collective dimensions of empowerment. Women's transformation did not occur individually; rather, it emerged through sustained interaction within *majelis taklim* and community discussion forums. These spaces functioned not only as sites of religious learning but also as arenas for trust-building, mutual support, and collective reflection. In this sense, empowerment operated through the creation of social capital, enabling women to develop confidence, solidarity, and moral influence within their communities.³⁵ This finding suggests that community-based empowerment is particularly effective because it strengthens both individual capacities and collective social networks simultaneously.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between religious moderation and everyday peacebuilding. Participants described how they applied the values of moderation through ordinary yet meaningful actions, such as teaching children to respect religious differences, maintaining communication with neighbors of different faiths, and mediating interpersonal conflicts. These actions may appear small and informal, yet they contribute significantly to sustaining peaceful coexistence. This finding aligns with the concept of everyday peacebuilding, which emphasizes that peace is often produced through routine social practices rather than through formal institutional interventions alone. In the context of Panindoan Village, women emerged as key actors in this process, transforming religious values into practical mechanisms for preventing conflict and strengthening social cohesion. Consequently, religious moderation should be viewed not only as a religious discourse but also as a grassroots peacebuilding strategy.

The findings additionally contribute to discussions on informal religious authority. Participants gained influence not through formal religious positions but through consistent ethical behavior, interpersonal trust, and active engagement in community affairs. This form of authority differs from conventional models that associate religious leadership with institutional status or formal credentials.³⁶ Instead, authority emerged relationally through social interactions and community recognition. In the context of Panindoan Village, women who demonstrated wisdom, fairness, and commitment to communal harmony were increasingly trusted as mediators and sources of moral guidance. This finding broadens existing understandings of religious authority by highlighting how informal actors, particularly women, contribute to shaping religious life and promoting moderation at the grassroots level.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing scholarship on gender, religion, and social transformation by integrating perspectives of lived religion, women's religious agency, community-based empowerment, social capital, informal religious authority, and everyday peacebuilding. The findings suggest that strengthening religious moderation requires approaches that move beyond top-down policy interventions and instead recognize the importance of local social contexts, participatory learning processes, and women's contributions as moral agents within their communities. Practically, these findings imply that programs aimed at promoting religious moderation should be designed in a community-based and gender-sensitive manner, with greater recognition of women's roles in fostering social harmony, interreligious understanding, and sustainable peace at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious moderation is best understood as a lived social practice rather than merely a theological doctrine or a government policy agenda. Drawing on the experiences of Muslim women in Panindooan Village, North Sumatra, the findings reveal that religious moderation is continuously negotiated through everyday interactions, family relationships, community engagement, and interreligious encounters. Living within a broader multi-religious environment, participants experienced religious moderation not as an abstract concept but as a practical necessity for maintaining harmonious social relations while preserving their religious commitments.

The findings indicate that Muslim women initially faced several challenges in understanding and practicing religious moderation. Limited access to contextual and gender-responsive religious education often resulted in moderation being perceived as a formal or institutional concept rather than an ethical framework

for everyday life. Nevertheless, women consistently played important roles in maintaining family stability, fostering social cohesion, and mediating relationships across religious boundaries. These roles were largely informal and often unrecognized within formal religious structures, highlighting the limitations of dominant approaches that focus primarily on institutions, policies, and male religious leadership.

The study further reveals that community-based empowerment, particularly through majelis taklim activities, collective reflection, and dialogue-based learning, significantly contributed to the development of women's religious agency. Participants gradually reinterpreted religious moderation as a social and moral responsibility rather than merely a personal religious obligation. This transformation occurred through relational learning processes that strengthened confidence, critical reflection, and collective awareness. As a result, women became more active in promoting tolerance, resolving community tensions, and encouraging peaceful coexistence among people of different religious backgrounds.

A key contribution of this study is its demonstration that religious authority can emerge outside formal religious institutions. Women developed informal religious authority through ethical conduct, social trust, and sustained community engagement rather than through official leadership positions. Their ability to mediate conflicts, guide family members, and promote interreligious understanding illustrates how grassroots religious authority contributes to strengthening religious moderation in everyday life.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on lived religion, women's religious agency, community-based empowerment, and informal religious authority by showing how these perspectives intersect in the practice of religious moderation. The findings challenge institutional and male-centered understandings of religious authority and highlight the central role of Muslim

women as moral actors and agents of social harmony. Practically, the study suggests that efforts to strengthen religious moderation should move beyond top-down policy dissemination and instead support community-based, gender-sensitive initiatives that recognize women's contributions in fostering social cohesion, interreligious understanding, and sustainable peace within diverse societies.

References

- Ammerman, Nancy T. "Finding Religion in Everyday Life." *Sociology of Religion* 75, no. 2 (2014): 189–207. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru013>
- Arik, Engina, and Sema Akboga. "Women's Studies in the Muslim World: A Bibliometric Perspective." *Publications* 6, no. 43 (2018): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications6040043>
- Asari, Hasan, Sahkholid Nasution, and Harun Al-Rasyid. *Multikulturalisme: Tradisi Agung Nusantara dalam Praksis Universitas*. Edited by Saidatul Khairiyah. Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2025.
- Avishai, Orit. "Doing Religion' In a Secular World: Women in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency." *Gender & Society* 22, no. 4 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208321019>
- Badan Pusat Statistik Sumatera Utara. "Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Kabupaten/Kota Dan Agama Yang Dianut, 2024." <https://sumut.bps.go.id/>, 2025
- Badan Pusat Statistik Tapanuli Selatan. "Kabupaten Tapanuli Selatan Dalam Angka 2025." <https://tapanuliselatankab.bps.go.id>, 2025
- Chand, Satish Prakash. "Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations, and Document Analysis." *Adv Educ Res Eval* 6, no. 1 (2025): 303–17. <https://doi.org/10.25082/AERE.2025.01.001>
- Erawadi, Erawadi, and Fadlan Masykura Setiadi. "Exploring Religious Harmony Through Dalihan Na Tolu: Local Wisdom in

- Peacebuilding in Indonesia.” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no.3(2024): 1379–1408. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1398>
- Geampana, Alina, and Manuela Perrotta. “Using Interview Excerpts to Facilitate Focus Group Discussion.” *Sage* 25, no. 1 (2025): 130–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241234283>
- Hanum, Latifah. “Perempuan Di Lembaga Pendidikan Al Jam’iyatul Washliyah.” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 29–49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v2i1.1755>
- Harahap, Hasmi Hidayah. “Pemahaman Awal Tentang Moderasi Beragama.” Tapanuli Selatan, 2026.
- Harahap, Sumper Mulia, and Hamka Hamka. “Investigating the Roles of Philosophy, Culture, Language and Islam in Angkola’s Local Wisdom of ‘Dalihan Na Tolu.’” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8164>
- Hasan, Kamaruddin, and Hamdan Juhannis. “Religious Education and Moderation: A Bibliometric Analysis.” *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2292885>
- Hutasuhut, Yuli Kartika, and Risalan Basri Harahap. “Pelaksanaan Akad Mukhabarah.” *EL-THAWALIB* 3, no. 3 (2022): 448–60. <https://doi.org/10.24952/el-thawalib.v3i3.5643>
- Lahmar, Fella. “Redefining Leadership: The Role of Spirituality and Motherhood in Muslim Women’s Educational Leadership.” *Religions* 15, no. 1565 (2024): 1–23.
- Marjani, Gustiana Isya. “Overcoming Theological Dilemmas: Fostering Religious Moderation through the Resolution of Faith and Rationality.” *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya* 7249 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.15575/rjsalb.v7i2.28311>
- McClure, Jennifer M. “Homophily and Social Capital in a Network of Religious Congregations.” *Religions* 12, no. 653 (2021): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080653>
- Mince, Leryani, Maria Manuain, East Nusa, Suryaningsi Mila.

- “Beyond Religious Tolerance: Reflecting the Interfaith Women’s Dialogue.” *PENAMAS: Journal of Religion and Society* 37, no. 1 (2024): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v37i1.743>
- Mohamed, Alwy Ahmed, Hanan Zakirah Harun, and Usman Aliyu. “Gender and Religious Authority in Muslim Communities: A Systematic Qualitative Literature Review (2000–2025).” *Ishraqi* 24, no. 2 (2026): 381–96. <https://doi.org/10.23917/ishraqi.v24i2.13284>
- Mufi, Akhmad Munir, Aminullah Elhady, and Mursalim. “Internalization Of Religious Moderation Values: Active Tolerance And Social Harmony In Education In Indonesia.” *El-Tarbawj* 16, no. 1 (2023): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.20885/tarbawi.vol16.iss1.art1>
- Muhibbi, Moh Saddam, Mohd Faiz, Mohd Yaakob, and Sunariya Utama. “Religious Moderation Practices in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review on Typology, Strategy, and Evaluation.” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 22, no. 2 (2025): 423–45. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v22i2.11691>
- Mukhibat, M., Mukhlison Effendi, Wawan Herry Setyawan, and M. Sutoyo. “Development and Evaluation of Religious Moderation Education Curriculum at Higher Education in Indonesia.” *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2302308>
- Nasution, Sahkholid, Hasan Asari, and Harun Al-Rasyid. “Kitab Kuning and Religious Moderation: A Study on State Islamic Universities in Indonesia.” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 2 (2024): 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol19no2.5>
- Podar, Monica-diana. “Attempting a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Dissertation with Refugee Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic or: How I Learned to Embrace Messiness and Failure.” *SSM - Qualitative Research in Health* 5, no. July 2023 (2024): 100389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2023.100389>
- Sahrul, Sahrul, and Afrahul Fadhila Daulai. “Kearifan Lokal Dalihan Na Tolu, Ninik Mamak Dan Kerapatan Adat Nagari Dalam Menjaga Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama

- Di Sumatera Barat Dan Sumatera Utara.” *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 43, no. 2 (2019): 300–323. <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v43i2.606>
- Setinawati, Isabella Jeniva, Maidiantius Tanyid, and Merilyn. “Social Sciences & Humanities Open The Framework of Religious Moderation: A Socio-Theological Study on the Role of Religion and Culture from Indonesia’s Perspective.” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11 (2025): 101271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101271>
- Sihombing, Jaliah. “Praktik Sehari-Hari Moderasi Keagamaan Di Panindooan.” Tapanuli Selatan, 2026.
- Sterchele, Davide. “The Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Form of Football Rituals: The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina.” *Social Compass* 54, no. 2 (2008).
- Subchi, Imam, Zulkifli Zulkifli, Rena Latifa, and Sholikatus Sa’diyah. “Religious Moderation in Indonesian Muslims.” *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050451>
- Supandi, Mujiburrohman, and Taufiqurrohman. “The Role of Government and Community in Supporting Religious Moderation Programs: A Survey Method.” *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2026): 146–65. <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v5i1.906>
- Syahril, Syahril, Suryadi Fajri, Fatmi Fauzani Duski, Aulia Rahmi Putri, and Zulpadrianto Zulpadrianto. “Exploring Religious Moderation in the Halaqah Education System of Islamic Boarding Schools in Socio-Historical Perspective.” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 277–302. <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v8i2.22070>
- Uyuni, Badrah, Mohammad Adnan, Abdul Hadi, Muallimah Rodhiyana, and Sarbini Anim. “Virtual Spaces of Islamic Preaching: Digital Majelis Taklim and the Changing Role of Women in Indonesia.” *SCIEPublish* 3, no. 10005 (2025): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.70322/natanthropol.2025.10005>
- Wahyuningsih. “Muslim Feminism: A Systematic Literature

Review and Bibliometric Analysis.” *Journal of Religion and Communication Studies* 2, no. 2 (2025): 81-96. <https://doi.org/10.61511/jorcs.v2i2.2025.2223>

Wati, Irma. “Pemahaman Wanita Muslim Melalui Pemberdayaan Berbasis Komunitas.” Tapanuli Selatan, 2026.

Zaluchu, Sonny Eli, Priyantoro Widodo, and Agus Kriswanto. “Conceptual Reconstruction of Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context Based on Previous Research: Bibliometric Analysis.” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11 (2025): 101552. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101552>

Endnotes:

¹ Imam Subchi et al., "Religious Moderation in Indonesian Muslims," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050451>

² Sonny Eli Zaluchu, Priyantoro Widodo, and Agus Kriswanto, "Conceptual Reconstruction of Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context Based on Previous Research: Bibliometric Analysis," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11 (2025): 101552, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101552>; Sahkholid Nasution, Hasan Asari, and Harun Al-Rasyid, "Kitab Kuning and Religious Moderation: A Study on State Islamic Universities in Indonesia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 2 (2024): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol19no2.5>

³ Sahrul Sahrul and Afrahul Fadhila Daulai, "Kearifan Lokal Dalihan Na Tolu, Ninik Mamak Dan Kerapatan Adat Nagari Dalam Menjaga Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama Di Sumatera Barat Dan Sumatera Utara," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 43, no. 2 (2019): 300–323, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v43i2.606>; Sumper Mulia Harahap and Hamka Hamka, "Investigating the Roles of Philosophy, Culture, Language and Islam in Angkola's Local Wisdom of 'Dalihan Na Tolu,'" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8164>; Erawadi Erawadi and Fadlan Masykura Setiadi, "Exploring Religious Harmony Through Dalihan Na Tolu: Local Wisdom in Peacebuilding in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (2024): 1379–1408, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1398>

⁴ Akhmad Munir Mufi, Aminullah Elhady, and Mursalim, "Internalization Of Religious Moderation Values: Active Tolerance And Social Harmony In Education In Indonesia," *El-Tarbawj* 16, no. 1 (2023): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.20885/tarbawi.vol16.iss1.art1>

⁵ Nancy T Ammerman, "Finding Religion in Everyday Life," *Sociology of Religion* 75, no. 2 (2014): 189–207, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru013>

⁶ Latifah Hanum, "Perempuan Di Lembaga Pendidikan Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 29–49, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v2i1.1755>

⁷ Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, Hanan Zakirah Harun, and Usman Aliyu, "Gender and Religious Authority in Muslim Communities: A Systematic Qualitative Literature Review(2000–2025)," *Ishraqi* 24, no. 2 (2026): 381–96, <https://doi.org/10.23917/ishraqi.v24i2.13284>

⁸ Orit Avishai, "'Doing Religion' In a Secular World: Women in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency," *Gender & Society* 22, no. 4 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208321019>

⁹ Badrah Uyuni et al., "Virtual Spaces of Islamic Preaching: Digital Majelis Taklim and the Changing Role of Women in Indonesia," *SCIEPublish* 3, no. 10005 (2025): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.70322/natanthropol.2025.10005>

¹⁰ Davide Sterchele, "The Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Form of Football Rituals: The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Social Compass* 54, no. 2 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768607077032>; Fella Lahmar, "Redefining Leadership: The Role of Spirituality and Motherhood in Muslim Women's Educational Leadership," *Religions* 15, no. 1565 (2024): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121565>

- ¹¹ Kamaruddin Hasan and Hamdan Juhannis, "Religious Education and Moderation: A Bibliometric Analysis," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2292885>
- ¹² Supandi, Mujiburrohman, and Taufiqurrohman, "The Role of Government and Community in Supporting Religious Moderation Programs: A Survey Method," *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2026): 146-65, <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v5i1.906>
- ¹³ Moh Saddam Muhibbi et al., "Religious Moderation Practices in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review on Typology, Strategy, and Evaluation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 22, no. 2 (2025): 423-45. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v22i2.11691>
- ¹⁴ M. Mukhibat et al., "Development and Evaluation of Religious Moderation Education Curriculum at Higher Education in Indonesia," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2302308>; Hasan Asari, Sahkholid Nasution, and Harun Al-Rasyid, *Multikulturalisme: Tradisi Agung Nusantara Dalam Praksis Universitas*, ed. Saidatul Khairiyah (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2025).
- ¹⁵ Gustiana Isya Marjani, "Overcoming Theological Dilemmas: Fostering Religious Moderation through the Resolution of Faith and Rationality," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya* 7249 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.15575/rjsalb.v7i2.28311>
- ¹⁶ Engina Arik and Sema Akboga, "Women's Studies in the Muslim World: A Bibliometric Perspective," *Publications* 6, no. 43 (2018): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications6040043>
- ¹⁷ Ammerman, "Finding Religion in Everyday Life."
- ¹⁸ Badan Pusat Statistik Tapanuli Selatan, "Kabupaten Tapanuli Selatan Dalam Angka 2025," <https://tapanuliselatankab.bps.go.id>, 2025.
- ¹⁹ Yuli Kartika Hutasuhut and Risalan Basri Harahap, "Pelaksanaan Akad Mukhabarah," *EL-THAWALIB* 3, no. 3 (2022): 448-60. <https://doi.org/10.24952/el-thawalib.v3i3.5643>
- ²⁰ Badan Pusat Statistik Sumatera Utara, "Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Kabupaten/Kota Dan Agama Yang Dianut, 2024," <https://sumut.bps.go.id/>, 2025.
- ²¹ Leryani Mince et al., "Beyond Religious Tolerance: Reflecting the Interfaith Women's Dialogue," *PENAMAS: Journal of Religion and Society* 37, no. 1 (2024): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v37i1.743>
- ²² Monica-diana Podar, "Attempting a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Dissertation with Refugee Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic or: How I Learned to Embrace Messiness and Failure," *SSM - Qualitative Research in Health* 5, no. July 2023 (2024): 100389, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2023.100389>
- ²³ Hutasuhut and Harahap, "Pelaksanaan Akad Mukhabarah."
- ²⁴ Satish Prakash Chand, "Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations, and Document Analysis," *Adv Educ Res Eval* 6, no. 1 (2025): 303-17, <https://doi.org/10.25082/AERE.2025.01.001>

- ²⁵ Alina Geampana and Manuela Perrotta, "Using Interview Excerpts to Facilitate Focus Group Discussion," *Sage* 25, no. 1 (2025): 130–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241234283>
- ²⁶ Chand, "Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations, and Document Analysis."
- ²⁷ Irma Wati, "Pemahaman Wanita Muslim Melalui Pemberdayaan Berbasis Komunitas" (Tapanuli Selatan, 2026).
- ²⁸ Hasmi Hidayah Harahap, "Pemahaman Awal Tentang Moderasi Beragama" (Tapanuli Selatan, 2026).
- ²⁹ Jaliah Sihombing, "Praktik Sehari-Hari Moderasi Keagamaan Di Panindooan" (Tapanuli Selatan, 2026).
- ³⁰ Ammerman, "Finding Religion in Everyday Life."
- ³¹ Setinawati et al., "Social Sciences & Humanities Open The Framework of Religious Moderation: A Socio-Theological Study on the Role of Religion and Culture from Indonesia's Perspective," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11 (2025): 101271, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101271>
- ³² Syahril Syahril et al., "Exploring Religious Moderation in the Halaqah Education System of Islamic Boarding Schools in Socio-Historical Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 277–302, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v8i2.22070>
- ³³ Wahyuningsih, "Muslim Feminism: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis," *Journal of Religion and Communication Studies* 2, no. 2 (2025): 81–96. 2i2.2025.2223
- ³⁴ Lahmar, "Redefining Leadership: The Role of Spirituality and Motherhood in Muslim Women's Educational Leadership."
- ³⁵ Jennifer M. McClure, "Homophily and Social Capital in a Network of Religious Congregations," *Religions* 12, no. 653 (2021): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080653>
- ³⁶ Zaluchu, Widodo, and Kriswanto, "Conceptual Reconstruction of Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context Based on Previous Research: Bibliometric Analysis."