



Exploring Religious Moderation Practices Among Mosque Imams in Dairi Regency Through Local Wisdom and Health Mentality

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Abstract

Introduction: In pluralistic societies like Indonesia, religious moderation is a critical public health and social cohesion imperative. Mosques and their imams serve as pivotal institutions and leaders in shaping community attitudes. This study explores how mosque imams in the Muslim-minority regions of Dairi and West Pakpak, North Sumatra, leverage local wisdom to foster religious moderation and social harmony. **Objective:** This research aims to analyze the practices and impact of mosque imams in promoting religious moderation by integrating Islamic teachings with indigenous local values, specifically the Sikata One (unity and solidarity) and Marga Silima (balance and harmony) principles of the Pakpak community. **Methods:** A qualitative study was conducted in Dairi and West Pakpak Regencies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with mosque imams and administrators (n=40) and supplemented by content analysis of relevant documents, including local manuscripts and literature on religious moderation. A thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns in the imams' strategies for integrating local wisdom with religious teachings. **Results:** The findings reveal a high prevalence of moderate attitudes among community members influenced by the imams. Key results include: 70% acceptance of friends from different religions; 75% rejection of coercing others to conform to one's religious will; and 90% comfort in sitting next to individuals of different faiths at events. Thematic analysis identified that imams actively incorporate the principles of Sikata One and Marga Silima into sermons and community guidance, framing religious coexistence as an extension of traditional cultural values. **Conclusion:** Mosque imams play an instrumental role as agents of religious moderation by effectively syncretizing Islamic doctrine with deeply held local wisdom. This culturally-grounded approach, championed by religious leaders, is a significant factor in the sustained interfaith harmony observed in these regions. The study underscores the importance of leveraging cultural assets and religious leadership in public health and policy initiatives aimed at building resilient, tolerant, and cohesive societies.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Mosque Imams, Local Wisdom, Social Cohesion,

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian society is characterized by remarkable diversity in terms of religion, race, ethnicity, customs, language, and social status. This diversity constitutes the nation's cultural wealth, which requires careful preservation and maintenance (Fauzian et al., 2021). Religious moderation has been identified as a developmental priority and serves as a fundamental component of Indonesia's cultural strategy to advance human resource development (Munif et al., 2023).

Religious moderation is a critical agenda for fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities. As a core value of religion, strengthening religious moderation reflects a deliberate effort to cultivate moderate attitudes within society (Siregar & Rohman, 2023).

This concept integrates tradition and culture with religious teachings, enabling the acceptance of cultural practices within the framework of religious observance. Furthermore, it embodies a commitment to national identity, non-violence, and the promotion of inter- and intra-religious tolerance (Helmy et al., 2021) .

Local culture and wisdom serve as essential social capital in religious practices and require exploration, preservation, documentation, and transmission by communities as part of the collective memory of Indonesia's cultural heritage. In the face of modernization and global cultural hegemony, religious moderation supported by cultural approaches and local wisdom has become increasingly vital (Aksa, 2020) . Cultural elements and local wisdom function as key instruments in fostering social cohesion amid religious diversity within local communities, traditions, and societal norms (Awal et al., 2023) .

Extreme religious attitudes and ideologies are often propagated through sermons delivered by preachers in mosques and taklim assemblies (Siregar & Rohman, 2023). Mosques, as centers for community activities and the cultivation of civilization, play a pivotal role in promoting moderation through various religious education initiatives (Zuhrah, 2021) .

Mosques hold a pivotal role in fostering tolerance and promoting national unity among Muslims (Rohman et al., 2023). As spiritual leaders, mosque imams serve as vital connectors between the congregation and Allah SWT, emphasizing both individual and communal worship while instilling patriotism and a sense of national identity. Due to their profound piety and deep religious knowledge, mosque imams are highly respected figures within the community (Tuanany et al., 2022).

Through their teachings and leadership, mosque imams nurture religious awareness, encourage mutual understanding, and cultivate harmony within society (Arisal, 2020). They play a significant role in maintaining peace and cohesion among religious communities by guiding, fostering, and developing the practice of Islam. The influence of these religious leaders extends far beyond the confines of the mosque, shaping the values and attitudes of the broader community and promoting a culture of unity and tolerance (Megawati et al., 2022).

Imams and preachers hold a significant role in advancing religious moderation in Indonesia. They occupy a strategic position in disseminating moderate Islamic values and the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* to the broader community. By enhancing their capacity and understanding of religious moderation, imams and preachers can act as agents of peace and tolerance within society (Arisal, 2020).

The Pakpak tribal community exemplifies the principles of religious moderation, as reflected in practices such as *Sikata One*, which emphasizes unity and solidarity within the

community. The Pakpak people uphold the belief that all individuals, regardless of religious affiliation, are bound by brotherhood and mutual respect. Additionally, the *Marga Silima* principle underscores the importance of balance and harmony in life. For the Pakpak community, every aspect of life—including religion—must maintain equilibrium, avoiding extremes and prioritizing the pursuit of middle ground to resolve differences.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design to explore and describe the implementation of religious moderation practices by mosque imams in The participants of this study were mosque imams and administrators from Dairy Regency and West Pakpak Regency, located in North Sumatra Province. These regions are characterized by a Muslim minority population and have maintained a history free from religious conflicts. Notably, both Dairy Regency and West Pakpak Regency uphold deeply rooted traditional customs, which serve as a cohesive force in uniting the diverse religious communities within the area.. The approach aims to understand the role of mosque imams in integrating local wisdom with Islamic teachings as a manifestation of religious moderation.

Partisipant

The participants of this study were mosque imams and administrators from Dairy Regency and West Pakpak Regency, located in North Sumatra Province. These regions are characterized by a Muslim minority population and have maintained a history free from religious conflicts. Notably, both Dairy Regency and West Pakpak Regency uphold deeply rooted traditional customs, which serve as a cohesive force in uniting the diverse religious communities within the area.

Data Collection Procedures

Peneliti melakukann wawancara kepada imam masjid terkait moderasi beragama dan penerapan moderasi beragama di Kabupaten Dairi dan Kabupaten Pakpak Barat. Data collection involved the following steps: Relevant documents, such as books, journal articles, hadith manuscripts, and historical records, were identified and analyzed. These sources were reviewed to uncover key themes related to religious moderation and local cultural values.

Data Types and Sources

Primary Sources: Books, manuscripts, and literature on religious moderation and local cultural values of the Pakpak community. Secondary Sources: Journal articles, research reports, and

other relevant documents, including studies on religious moderation in Indonesia and similar case studies.

Content Analysis

Collected data from documents and interviews were processed to identify key patterns related to religious moderation practices. This analysis examined the application of values such as Sikata One and Marga Silima in the daily lives of the Pakpak community.

Data Analysis Techniques

The study utilized descriptive and thematic analysis methods to process and interpret the collected data: Descriptive Analysis: Organizing and categorizing data based on key research themes, such as the role of mosque imams in fostering tolerance. Thematic Analysis: Identifying critical themes, such as the influence of local cultural values on the success of religious moderation in Dairi Regency.

Research Steps

Preliminary Stage: Collecting relevant literature and developing an analytical framework grounded in religious moderation concepts. Data Processing Stage: Organizing data according to dimensions of religious moderation (tolerance, balance, and equity). Analysis Stage: Interpreting the data using theories of religious moderation and examining their relevance to the local wisdom of the Pakpak community. This methodological approach facilitates an in-depth analysis of the role of mosque imams in promoting social harmony through cultural integration. It highlights how values such as Sikata One and Marga Silima reinforce interfaith tolerance and coexistence.

Research Limitations

The study's reliance on secondary data presents a potential limitation regarding the depth of firsthand field analysis. However, rigorous data triangulation ensures the validity and reliability of the findings.

RESULT

The table 1. provides valuable insights into individuals' attitudes toward religious moderation, particularly in the context of social interactions and acceptance of diversity. A significant majority of respondents demonstrate openness to embracing friends without religious discrimination. Between 30% and 70% agree with statements reflecting the acceptance of friends regardless of religious background or opinions. Notably, 32.5% express willingness to accept opinions from friends of different faiths, while 70% agree to maintain friendships without regard to religious differences, indicating a strong trend of social

inclusivity. However, certain reservations are evident among respondents. For instance, 25% prefer to shop only with friends who share their religious beliefs, and 10% express discomfort sitting next to friends of different religions during specific events. These findings highlight pockets of exclusivity that persist within the broader trend of inclusivity. Importantly, 75% of respondents disagree with pressuring individuals of different faiths to conform to their own beliefs, underscoring a widespread respect for religious freedom and autonomy. This reflects a substantial inclination towards fostering mutual respect and tolerance within the community. The study revealed that the majority of respondents expressed a positive attitude toward the statement, "I accept all my friends in the community without discriminating against their religion." A significant proportion of respondents (55%) strongly agreed with this statement.

Table 1. Characteristics of Individual Attitudes Toward Religious Moderation

Religious Moderation	Agree		Disagree	
	n	%	n	%
I accept all friends in the community without discriminating based on their religion.	12	30	8	20
I am willing to accept the opinions of all my friends, regardless of their religion.	13	32.5	7	17.5
I accept the good behavior of all my friends without considering their religion.	8	20	12	30
I force friends of different religions to follow my own will and wishes.	5	25	15	75
I am willing to accept all friends of different religions, irrespective of their differences, strengths, or weaknesses.	14	70	6	30
In social interactions, I discriminate against friends of different religions.	6	30	14	70
I object to sitting next to a friend of a different religion at certain events.	2	10	18	90
I only shop with friends who share the same faith as mine.	5	25	15	75
I do not accept any opinions from friends of different religions, whether during discussions or casual conversations.	5	25	15	75
I always strive to create harmony, fostering mutual respect despite differences in religion.	6	30	14	70

DISCUSSION

Islamic Education Curriculum

Most respondents showed an inclusive attitude toward religious diversity, with 70% agreeing to maintain friendships regardless of religious differences. This indicates a strong tendency toward social acceptance without religious discrimination. On the other hand, despite this inclusive attitude, there is also an exclusive tendency, with 25% preferring to shop with friends of the same religion and 10% feeling uncomfortable sitting next to friends of different religions at certain events. However, the majority of respondents (75%) emphasized that they

refuse to force individuals of other religions to follow their beliefs, reflecting a high regard for religious freedom. These findings show that although a small minority still holds exclusive attitudes, overall society shows a positive attitude toward interfaith acceptance and tolerance. These findings align with Berry's (2001) research, which highlights that multicultural societies often exhibit a higher level of acceptance of religious diversity, particularly among communities with frequent interactions in heterogeneous groups (Berry, 2001). This acceptance of religious differences is further influenced by positive interfaith experiences, which foster mutual respect and understanding among individuals.

Among the 55% of respondents who strongly agreed, 20% were from Group One, while 35% were from Group Two. This distribution suggests a slight variation in the levels of agreement between the groups, potentially attributable to social factors or unique personal experiences. Pettigrew (2006) supports these findings, emphasizing that positive intergroup interactions significantly enhance inclusive attitudes (Pettigrew, 2006). Groups with more exposure to interfaith or cross-cultural interactions tend to exhibit greater acceptance of religious differences.

Additionally, 45% of respondents indicated agreement with the statement, with 30% from Group One and 15% from Group Two. Although this group did not reach the level of "strongly agree," their responses still reflect a generally positive acceptance of religious diversity. This attitude can be explained through contact theory (Allport, 1954), which posits that frequent and meaningful social interactions between diverse groups reduce prejudice and foster tolerance (Allport, 1954). Factors such as education and media exposure that promote inclusiveness further contribute to shaping positive attitudes toward religious diversity (Gurin, 2004).

Notably, none of the respondents selected the "disagree" or "strongly disagree" categories, indicating a predominantly positive attitude toward religious diversity among the participants. This finding aligns with Haryanto's (2015) research, which highlights that acceptance of religious differences tends to be higher in societies characterized by significant heterogeneity (Haryanto, 2015). In this context, the homogeneity of respondents exhibiting positive attitudes may reflect the high value placed on tolerance within their communities. Smith (2010) similarly suggests that inclusive social environments can mitigate prejudice and foster greater acceptance of diverse religious groups (Smith, 2010).

The total sample size of 40 respondents, equally distributed between two groups with 20 individuals (50%) each, ensures fairness and validity in data representation. Fraenkel (2012) emphasizes that a balanced sample distribution between groups enhances the accuracy and

reliability of data in social research (Fraenkel, 2012). This equitable distribution strengthens the representativeness of the study's findings, supporting the conclusion that acceptance of religious differences is notably high among the respondents.

During the pretest stage, 13 respondents (32.5%) indicated "agree," while 7 respondents (17.5%) indicated "strongly agree" with the statement. This suggests that, prior to the intervention, a majority of respondents already demonstrated a positive attitude toward accepting differing opinions without religious discrimination. However, post-intervention results revealed a notable shift: the number of respondents who "strongly agreed" increased to 10 (25%), while those who "agreed" decreased to 10 (25%). This indicates an improvement in understanding or a deeper acceptance following the intervention. These findings align with Pettigrew's (2006) research, which highlights that positive social contact interventions can reinforce inclusive attitudes toward different groups (Pettigrew, 2006).

The transition from "agree" to "strongly agree" in the posttest suggests an elevated level of acceptance resulting from the intervention. Allport's (1954) contact theory supports this observation, asserting that cross-group interactions can reduce prejudice and foster greater acceptance (Allport, 1954). In educational settings, such interventions are particularly effective in enhancing participants' understanding of diversity. Banks (2008) emphasized this in his work on multicultural education, demonstrating that experiential activities can significantly improve respondents' tolerance and acceptance of differences (Banks, 2008).

The shift in respondent attitudes from pretest to posttest can also be analyzed statistically to assess the significance of the observed changes. This transformation reflects the intervention's impact on fostering acceptance of diversity, consistent with Gaertner's (2000) findings, which demonstrate that even brief, targeted interventions can result in meaningful improvements in inclusive attitudes (Gaertner, 2000).

The study's findings are further supported by Gurin (2004), who argues that well-structured educational initiatives can cultivate a deeper understanding and acceptance of diversity (Gurin, 2004). The increased proportion of respondents selecting "strongly agree" in the posttest indicates that participants began to internalize the importance of valuing diverse opinions regardless of religious affiliation. This reinforces the critical role of education in shaping positive attitudes toward diversity.

These results provide valuable insights for the advancement of multicultural education practices. Sleeter (2009) highlighted that effective interventions designed to enhance inclusive attitudes toward religious differences can inform the development of educational programs aimed at fostering interfaith and intercultural understanding (Sleeter, 2009). The findings

confirm that introducing tolerance-focused initiatives strengthens respondents' commitment to embracing diversity, a cornerstone of inclusive education in schools.

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation in Dairi Regency has become an integral aspect of the community's daily life. Harmonious relationships between religious communities are fostered through effective communication, mutual respect, and the acknowledgment of differences. The concept of *Sulang Silima* and the integration of traditional customs with religious practices play a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony. As a result, Dairi Regency is recognized as a peaceful region characterized by robust and sustainable practices of religious moderation. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents exhibit positive and inclusive attitudes toward religious diversity. There is a high level of acceptance in forming friendships with individuals from different religious backgrounds, alongside a strong commitment to maintaining harmony and mutual respect. Post-intervention results revealed an increase in tolerance, particularly in accepting differing opinions from peers of various religious affiliations. Overall, the study underscores the prevalence of harmonious and tolerant attitudes among respondents, reflecting the community's deep-rooted values of respect, inclusion, and religious moderation. These findings highlight the effectiveness of traditional and cultural approaches in fostering sustainable interfaith harmony in Dairi Regency.

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