

## Cultivating Tolerance in East Priangan: Religious Moderation in the Eastern Universities of West Java, Indonesia

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### Abstract

Religious moderation has become increasingly relevant in diverse and pluralistic societies, particularly within academic settings where varying interpretations of religious teachings often emerge. This study highlights the growing need to explore and understand religious attitudes among students in the context of their social, cultural, and political influences. The study investigates students' perceptions and views regarding religious moderation by delving into critical issues such as the relationship between Pancasila and religion, the idea of a caliphate state, respect for state symbols, and attitudes toward violence. A quantitative survey approach involved 463 students selected through stratified random sampling from various study programs and semester levels. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire to assess students' perspectives on these controversial topics. The findings reveal a comprehensive picture of religious attitudes among students, emphasizing the importance of fostering religious moderation within academic environments. These results underline the necessity for effective educational strategies to promote understanding and respect for diverse beliefs while minimizing conflict. The study is significant for policymakers, educators, and practitioners because it offers insights into the dynamics of religious attitudes in higher education. By addressing the complexities of religious moderation, these findings contribute to developing strategies that can support harmonious coexistence in pluralistic academic communities.

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*Moderasi beragama menjadi semakin relevan dalam masyarakat yang beragam dan majemuk, terutama dalam lingkungan akademis di mana interpretasi yang berbeda dari ajaran agama sering muncul. Studi ini menyoroti kebutuhan yang semakin besar untuk mengeksplorasi dan memahami sikap keagamaan di kalangan mahasiswa dalam konteks pengaruh sosial, budaya, dan politik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki persepsi dan pandangan mahasiswa tentang moderasi beragama dengan menggali isu-isu kritis seperti hubungan antara Pancasila dan agama, gagasan negara kekhilafahan, penghormatan terhadap simbol-simbol negara, dan sikap terhadap kekerasan. Pendekatan survei kuantitatif digunakan, melibatkan 463 mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui pengambilan sampel acak bertingkat dari berbagai program studi dan tingkat semester. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur yang dirancang untuk menilai perspektif mahasiswa tentang topik-topik kontroversial ini. Temuan ini mengungkapkan gambaran yang komprehensif tentang sikap keagamaan di kalangan mahasiswa, yang menekankan pentingnya memupuk moderasi beragama di lingkungan akademis. Hasil penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya strategi pendidikan yang efektif untuk mempromosikan pemahaman dan penghormatan terhadap keyakinan yang beragam sambil meminimalkan konflik. Studi ini penting bagi para pembuat kebijakan, pendidik, dan praktisi, karena memberikan wawasan tentang dinamika sikap keagamaan di perguruan tinggi. Dengan membahas kompleksitas moderasi beragama, temuan ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan strategi yang dapat mendukung koeksistensi yang harmonis dalam komunitas akademik yang majemuk.*

**Keywords:** Islamic education; religious moderation; tolerance

## Introduction

Amid increasingly complex dynamics of religious diversity, the role of universities as a place for forming students' thoughts and character becomes critical. One aspect to focus on is religious moderation, a middle attitude prioritizing tolerance, dialogue, and understanding between religious believers. In a university environment, students have pivotal roles in determining the direction and form of religious life in an increasingly complex society (Mutawakkil, 2021). This implementation of religious moderation is one aspect that receives special attention as this stance presents diversity and tolerance and illustrates the maturity of thought and attitude needed to face diverse social dynamics (Ahmad & Saepudin, 2023).

This research was conducted at East Priangan College to explore the dynamics of religious moderation in different socio-cultural contexts more deeply. Garut, located in the area historically known as East Priangan, is

significant because of its past. East Priangan once had a dark history marked by a rebel group initiated by Kartosuwiryo, who proclaimed the sovereignty of the Indonesian Islamic state in East Priangan. This historical background adds complexity to the contemporary religious landscape in Garut, making it an interesting case study for exploring religious moderation. Apart from that, East Priangan is the base of the Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII).

East Priangan, located in the eastern region of West Java, Indonesia, holds a unique historical and cultural significance in shaping the dynamics of religious and social life. The area's religious landscape has been profoundly influenced by historical events such as the Darul Islam movement led by Kartosuwiryo in the mid-20th century. This movement, which sought to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, left lasting marks on the region's religious and social fabric. Such history highlights a deep interplay between religion, politics, and societal structures in East Priangan, offering a crucial context for understanding contemporary challenges and opportunities in promoting religious moderation.

The region is home to a rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity, with Sundanese traditions deeply intertwined with Islamic teachings. While Islam is the predominant religion, other faiths such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism coexist, contributing to a pluralistic society. This diversity necessitates ongoing efforts to foster mutual understanding and respect among different communities, which is a cornerstone of religious moderation. Traditional cultural practices, such as *silaturahmi* (social bonding) and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), have historically played a significant role in maintaining social harmony. However, modern influences and shifting societal dynamics challenge these traditional values, requiring innovative approaches to sustain cohesion.

Contemporary challenges in East Priangan's social-religious context include rising cases of intolerance, misinformation about religious practices, and the growing influence of transnational ideologies. The youth, particularly university students, are at the forefront of navigating these challenges. Their

perceptions and actions significantly impact the broader community, making their role in fostering religious moderation indispensable.

By conducting comparative research with another university, this study aimed to highlight variations in religious attitudes and perceptions across different academic environments. Understanding how religious moderation is perceived and practiced in diverse settings can provide valuable insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and practitioners in fostering a climate of tolerance and understanding within the academic community and society.

Religious moderation in higher education is important (Tolchah et al., 2021). As agents of change, students are responsible for forming inclusive attitudes and mutual respect between religious communities (Harahap et al., 2022). They are a generation that will significantly impact the nation's progress in terms of social, economic, and cultural development (Malik et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of religious moderation in the tertiary environment is an important first step in directing efforts to form character and thinking that aligns with the times' demands. (Nabhani et al., 2023). Therefore, religious moderation is an urgent matter that should be implemented in schools, higher education, and communities ((Pajariantto et al., 2023).

Higher education is a strategic environment for developing religious moderation among students (Haris et al., 2023). It is reflected in the various academic, religious, and social activities held on campus. However, these religious moderation efforts will only be implemented optimally with understanding and active participation from the students themselves (Azmi & Daulay, 2022). As higher education institutions, universities strategically shape students' views and attitudes towards religion. By creating an environment that supports dialogue between religious communities, universities provide space for students to deepen their understanding of religious beliefs and values while strengthening tolerance and respect for differences. It is a strong foundation for creating a harmonious and inclusive society (Parhan et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, a country with rich religious diversity, religious moderation has enormous relevance. As higher education institutions, universities are responsible for forming a young generation with an inclusive and tolerant

attitude toward religious differences (Aflahah et al., 2023). By strengthening moderate religious education and promoting dialogue between religious communities, universities can become agents of positive change in building a peaceful and harmonious society (Fathurrohman, 2022). Then, the higher education in East Priangan is responsible for managing the implementation of religious moderation.

Universities can take various strategic steps to increase students' understanding and support for religious moderation. For example, the educational curriculum should integrate extracurricular courses or programs that discuss religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue (Coleman & White, 2011; Khasanah et al., 2023). Developing study centers or research institutions focusing on religious diversity and pluralism can also be a practical step in broadening students' insight into this topic. In addition, it is also essential to actively involve students in various activities and initiatives aimed at promoting religious moderation. By providing opportunities for students to participate in discussions, seminars, or community projects to build tolerance and dialogue between religious communities, universities can help students internalize the values of religious moderation in their daily lives (Ajahari et al., 2023).

Thus, this research attempted to make a real contribution to strengthening inter-religious harmony in the university setting and formulating steps to strengthen the values of religious moderation in campus life. In this context, this research will examine students' perceptions of religious moderation in the tertiary environment (Azizah, 2023). It will focus on their understanding of religious moderation, especially students' views on several diversity issues in Indonesia (Pajariato et al., 2022). The results of this research would provide valuable assistance in maintaining harmony between religious communities and strengthening the values of religious moderation in higher education (Nugroho & Nailufaz, 2022).

From several previous studies, researchers saw that there were several gaps. First, more research must be conducted to address college students' perceptions of religious moderation. Previous research tends to explore lecturers' or instructors' views on religious moderation or examines the concept of religious

moderation from a theoretical perspective. However, in a university environment, students also play a crucial role in initiating and spreading the values of religious moderation. Therefore, a deep understanding of their perceptions will be vital in designing strategies to increase religious moderation among university students.

In addition, although several studies pay attention to student perceptions, there are still limitations in the number of studies conducted. Existing research tends only to provide a general overview or limited results and has yet to investigate the factors influencing students' perceptions of religious moderation. It shows there is still room for more in-depth and comprehensive research exploring students' understanding of religious moderation.

Previous research regarding this study focused on more than just the university environment as a research context. Although several studies did examine religious moderation in general society or the work environment, only a few specifically focused on the university setting. Higher education is a unique domain with complex diversity dynamics, where interactions between individuals from various religious backgrounds often occur. Therefore, research focusing more on higher education would provide deeper insight into how religious moderation can be implemented and understood by students in higher education.

This research utilized a quantitative descriptive method to analyze student perceptions of religious moderation in higher education. The method involved collecting, measuring, and analyzing quantitative data to understand the extent of attitudes towards religious moderation in the region, allowing for analyzing patterns, trends, and relationships between observed variables.

The approach used in selecting a random sampling technique of 463 students from various universities in East Priangan shows an effort to get a more accurate representation of the student population in the area. The main instrument used is a scale containing statements about religious moderation attitudes (see Table 1). Research ethics complied with ethical principles, including data security and respondent privacy.

Table 1  
Student Moderation Questionnaire Instrument

| No. | Question                                                                                                                 |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Pancasila does not conflict with religion.                                                                               |
| 2.  | The Indonesian state should establish a caliphate state by implementing Islamic ideology and Sharia as the basis of law. |
| 3.  | Leaders in Indonesia must be Muslims.                                                                                    |
| 4.  | Honoring the red and white flag is part of excessive activities leading to <i>shirk</i> .                                |
| 5.  | Suicide bombers are martyrs.                                                                                             |
| 6.  | Destroying the illegal places of worship of other religions is a commonplace attitude in our democracy.                  |
| 7.  | Is it permissible for a local leader who is a Muslim to wish other religions happy holidays?                             |

The rating scale used is a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where respondents had to rate to what extent they agree or disagree with these statements. A value of 1 indicated total disagreement, while 5 indicated total agreement. The statements presented came from theoretical indicators and previous research, synthesized from a theoretical basis.

### Religious Moderation in Learning

Research findings indicate that several universities in the Priangan Timur region have actively integrated the values of religious moderation into their learning processes. A concrete example is the implementation within the Civic Education course. This course not only focuses on national issues but also teaches concepts of interfaith and intercultural tolerance (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016; Azra, 2006). In the learning process, students are involved in open discussions exploring the relationship between Pancasila and the religious values embraced by Indonesian society. This approach aligns with Pitrianiingsi et al. (2023) view that interfaith education plays a strategic role in enhancing inter-religious understanding. Discussions facilitated by lecturers also address real cases of intolerance and seek solutions based on moderation

values. Interviews with students indicate that this method effectively increases their awareness of the importance of respecting diversity.

The implementation of religious moderation is also reflected in extracurricular learning activities, such as interdisciplinary projects involving students from various religious backgrounds. One university, for example, runs a community service program that requires students to collaborate in social activities within multireligious communities. This activity aligns with Munawir's idea (2023) emphasizing the importance of interfaith cooperation in strengthening harmonious social relationships. Field observations reveal that students participating in these activities report an increased understanding of tolerance values and the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships in diverse societies. This program is considered effective because it provides students with direct experience in applying religious moderation in real life.

Moreover, some universities have incorporated interfaith discussion activities as part of their academic programs. These discussions are designed to provide a healthy dialogue space for students from various religious backgrounds to talk about the role of religion in social life and the challenges of diversity. Interviews conducted with students reveal that these activities not only broaden their perspectives but also help eliminate stereotypes about other religions. This is in line with the view of Harahap et al. (2022), who state that interfaith dialogue is an effective strategy to foster attitudes of religious moderation and prevent inter-religious conflicts. Discussions facilitated by lecturers also provide an understanding that religion plays a crucial role in strengthening national unity.

As a form of implementing moderation values, some universities organize public lectures on diversity and tolerance. In these programs, speakers from various religious backgrounds are invited to discuss moderation values and share their experiences in maintaining harmony in society. Research findings show that students who attend these public lectures tend to be more active in contributing to activities that support moderation values, both on campus and in the surrounding community. Some students are even inspired to create their own discussion groups that explore interfaith and intercultural topics.



From a curriculum perspective, some lecturers have incorporated specific materials on religious moderation into their courses, even though they are not explicitly listed in the syllabus. In the social pathology course, for example, lecturers encourage students to understand social phenomena related to inter-religious conflicts and seek solutions based on dialogue and moderation. This aligns with several studies, which emphasizes that education based on religious moderation can help students understand inclusive values in addressing complex social issues (Pradana et al., 2023; Rohmawati & Izza, 2022; Subchi et al., 2022). This approach allows students to see moderation not just as a theory but as a principle that can be applied in various aspects of social life. Thus, moderation values become increasingly internalized in students' mindsets and behaviors.

### **The Role of Lecturers in Implementing and Promoting Religious Moderation**

This study presents significant findings on the role of lecturers in implementing and promoting religious moderation in higher education. The results indicate that lecturers, as academic facilitators, have a responsibility to create an inclusive learning environment and encourage a deep understanding of the values of tolerance and diversity. A study by Haris et al. (2023) emphasizes that lecturers do not only act as educators but also as agents of change who instill moderation values in various courses. This implementation can be carried out through a curriculum based on religious moderation, classroom discussions, and project-based learning that involves students in interfaith interactions. In this study, it was found that an approach integrating religious moderation into course materials effectively enhances students' understanding of the importance of inclusive attitudes in social life.

In addition to their role as educators, lecturers also serve as role models for students in practicing religious moderation. Exemplary attitudes and daily actions, such as respecting differences in beliefs and fostering constructive dialogue, play a crucial role in instilling moderation values (Parhan et al., 2022). This study found that students are more likely to accept the concept of

religious moderation when they witness real examples from their lecturers. This role-modeling approach aligns with the concept of the "hidden curriculum," in which values instilled indirectly through lecturers' behavior have a significant impact on shaping students' character.

Furthermore, lecturers can act as bridges between academia, society, and the government to strengthen the implementation of religious moderation. A study by Fathurrohman (2022) highlights that collaboration between universities and local communities in community service activities can enhance students' understanding of pluralism and diversity. For instance, community service programs involving students in interfaith activities can serve as an effective medium for reinforcing religious moderation values at the grassroots level. Thus, lecturers play a strategic role in ensuring that religious moderation is not merely an academic concept but is also applied in students' real lives.

### **Students' Perceptions of Religious Moderation**

Students have positive perceptions and attitudes toward the concept and practice of religious moderation in the university environment. The perceptions of university students regarding religious moderation have profound implications for social cohesion and harmony in East Priangan. As future leaders, their understanding and attitudes towards interfaith relations influence societal dynamics, including the potential for conflict or collaboration. Positive perceptions of religious moderation among students can foster greater inclusivity and cooperation, while negative or extremist views may exacerbate divisions and tensions within the community. The results of data calculations can be seen in Table 2.

Students who embrace religious moderation contribute to strengthening social cohesion by promoting tolerance and dialogue across different religious groups. Their engagement in interfaith activities, such as community service projects and academic forums, fosters mutual respect and understanding. Such initiatives bridge gaps between diverse communities and serve as platforms for addressing misconceptions and prejudices.

Table 2  
Statistical Data Results

| No. | Indicator                                                                                                                | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1.  | Pancasila does not conflict with religion                                                                                | 39.7%          | 46.4% | 3.50%     | 8.90%    | 1.50%             |
| 2.  | The Indonesian state should establish a caliphate state by implementing Islamic ideology and Sharia as the basis of law. | 10.4%          | 25.9% | 32%       | 25.1%    | 5.8%              |
| 3.  | Leaders in Indonesia must be Muslims                                                                                     | 40.8%          | 32.8% | 12%       | 13.2%    | 1.3%              |
| 4.  | Honoring the red and white flag is part of excessive activities leading to shirk.                                        | 3%             | 7.3%  | 12.5%     | 14.9%    | 62.2%             |
| 5.  | Suicide bombers are martyrs.                                                                                             | 0.9%           | 3.9%  | 7.8%      | 40%      | 47.5%             |
| 6.  | Destroying the illegal places of worship of other religions is a commonplace attitude in our democracy.                  | 1.3%           | 5.4%  | 12.5%     | 47.3%    | 33.5%             |
| 7.  | Is it permissible for a local leader who is a Muslim to wish other religions happy holidays?                             | 6.75%          | 49.5% | 25.9%     | 13.6%    | 4.3%              |

Source: Primary Data

However, the persistence of extremist ideologies among a minority of students poses risks to social harmony (Cherney et al., 2021). Misinterpretations of religious teachings, often fueled by inadequate education or exposure to radical narratives, can lead to polarized views and discriminatory behaviors. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive educational strategy emphasizing critical thinking, empathy, and the ethical dimensions of religious teachings.

The potential for conflict and harmony is ever-present in a diverse region like East Priangan. Students' perceptions of religious moderation play a pivotal role in determining which outcomes prevail. Students who view diversity as a strength and engage in collaborative efforts contribute to a culture of peace and inclusivity. Conversely, the likelihood of inter-religious conflict increases when they harbor biases or subscribe to exclusive ideologies.

Educational institutions are responsible for shaping students' perceptions to minimize conflict and maximize harmony (Muhtar et al., 2022). It involves creating a curriculum integrating religious moderation, fostering open discussions about sensitive topics, and providing platforms for interfaith dialogue. Such efforts are instrumental in equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate a pluralistic society.

Universities in East Priangan have a strategic role in cultivating religious moderation among students. By incorporating values of inclusivity, tolerance, and respect into their academic and extracurricular programs, these institutions can address the root causes of intolerance and extremism. For example, organizing interfaith dialogue workshops or religious pluralism seminars can broaden students' perspectives and promote a deeper appreciation of diversity.

Moreover, universities can collaborate with local communities and religious leaders to create initiatives reinforcing religious moderation principles. These collaborations can include joint community service projects, cultural exchange programs, and public discussions emphasizing the shared values of different faith traditions. Such initiatives strengthen the bond between academia and society and position universities as catalysts for positive change in fostering social harmony.

### **Pancasila and Religious Compatibility**

The first indicator reveals that 1.50% of students believe Pancasila contradicts religion. This perception often stems from differing interpretations of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in One Almighty God), which is inherently inclusive and does not exclusively represent one particular religion. This inclusivity may create a sense of marginalization for certain groups as they feel their specific religious values are not fully reflected in this concept.

Indonesia's harmonious coexistence of Pancasila and Islam promotes unity, diversity, and cultural heritage, with acculturation integrating values into daily life through traditions and practices (Badrin et al., 2023). The Indonesian government has consistently worked to reconcile Pancasila with religious freedom, as outlined in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN),<sup>1</sup> which emphasizes strengthening religious moderation. These efforts underscore the interpretation of Pancasila as a philosophical foundation that respects religious diversity and fosters unity across Indonesia's pluralistic society. The findings affirm the necessity of ongoing education to promote a deeper understanding of Pancasila's inclusive values among students.

### **Support for a Caliphate State**

Approximately 35.9% of students agreed with the idea that Indonesia should become a caliphate state governed by Islamic ideology and Sharia law. This finding highlights a contentious issue, as such a governance model contradicts the principles of Pancasila, which promotes respect for all religious and cultural identities within Indonesia.

The support for a caliphate state likely reflects ideological currents within society influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors (Isani, 2019). However, the majority view aligns with democratic principles and pluralism, emphasizing that governance should represent Indonesia's diverse population. It underscores the need for continued efforts to reinforce democratic values and inclusivity through targeted educational programs.

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<sup>1</sup> RPJMN – *Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional*.

### **Religious Requirements for Leadership**

Most students (73.6%) agree that Indonesian leaders should be Muslim. While this view aligns with the demographic reality of Indonesia, where the majority of citizens are Muslim, it also raises questions about inclusivity in leadership. The Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and equality in leadership opportunities based on competence, integrity, and commitment rather than religious affiliation.

Education and public discourse should emphasize the importance of leadership qualities over religious identity to foster inclusivity and democratic principles (Holidin, 2022). These discussions can help balance students' desires for religious representation with the broader national need for unity and equality.

### **Respect for National Symbols**

The belief that respecting the national flag equates to *shirk* (idolatry) was endorsed by 10.3% of students. This perception reflects a misunderstanding of patriotism, as respecting the flag symbolizes national unity and love for the homeland rather than deviating from religious principles.

Promoting education about the symbolic meaning of national symbols and their compatibility with religious values is critical. According to Elgenius, the flag has become a significant political symbol due to its abstract representation of complex nationhood and its continued use as a visual declaration of independence, which has a religious factor behind it as one of several factors (Elgenius, 2011). Encouraging discussions on the intersection of nationalism and faith could address misconceptions and foster a sense of pride and unity among students.

### **Martyrdom and Violence**

Despite the general rejection of extremism, 5.8% of students consider suicide bombers as martyrs, which contradicts Islamic teachings that emphasize peace and prohibit violence against innocent individuals. Similarly, 6.9% of students view destroying illegal places of worship as acceptable, reflecting a lack of understanding of democratic principles and human rights.

These findings highlight the importance of reinforcing the values of non-violence, tolerance, and respect for religious freedom through curriculum enhancements and interfaith dialogue (Abu-Nimer, 2022; Popovska et al., 2017). Universities play a vital role in addressing these issues by promoting critical thinking and ethical reasoning among students.

### **Interfaith Greetings by Muslim Leaders**

The last indicator shows that 4.3% of students oppose Muslim leaders wishing members of other religions a happy holiday. This perspective reflects a narrow interpretation of religious teachings, ignoring the broader Islamic principles of harmony and mutual respect (*muamalah*).

Encouraging interfaith dialogue and inclusive leadership practices can address this issue. Such efforts can highlight the significance of simple gestures, like holiday greetings, in fostering social cohesion and promoting peace in diverse communities. There are seven indicators of religious moderation: 1. Pancasila does not conflict with religion; 2. The Indonesian state should establish a caliphate state by implementing Islamic ideology and Sharia as the basis of law; 3. Leaders in Indonesia must be Muslims; 4. Honoring the red and white flag is part of excessive activities leading to shirk; 5. Suicide bombers are martyrs; 6. Destroying the illegal places of worship of other religions is a commonplace attitude in our democracy; 7. How tolerable it is for a Muslim local leader to wish other religions happy holidays (Tim Peneliti Balitbang Agama RI, 2018)

The first indicator shows that 1.50% of students still believe Pancasila contradicts religion. It is mainly related to the concept of Belief in One Almighty God, which is inclusive and does not exclusively adhere to one particular religion. It causes some people or groups to feel that their religious values are not fully reflected in the concept of Belief in the Almighty God recognized in Pancasila. It is important to note that, in practice, the Indonesian government has attempted to balance the principles of Pancasila and religious freedom (Arifinsyah et al., 2020; Rofii, 2021). For instance, the government generates the regulation in The 2020-2024 National Medium-Term National (RPJM) to manage the strengthening of religious moderation. Even though

there are doubts or differences of opinion regarding the relationship between Pancasila and religion, the principles of Pancasila should be interpreted as an inclusive basis and respect for the diversity of religions and beliefs in Indonesia (Daheri et al., 2023).

The persistence of the belief among 1.50% of students that Pancasila contradicts religion, particularly about the concept of Belief in One Almighty God, underscores a nuanced challenge within Indonesian society. This perception may stem from various factors, including differing interpretations of religious teachings, cultural influences, and historical contexts. For some individuals or groups, the inclusive nature of Pancasila's concept of the Almighty God might not fully align with their specific religious beliefs, leading to a sense of dissonance or marginalization.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the Indonesian government has made concerted efforts to balance the principles of Pancasila and religious freedom. Despite doubts or differing opinions regarding the relationship between Pancasila and religion, it is imperative to interpret the principles of Pancasila as providing an inclusive foundation and respecting the diversity of religions and beliefs in Indonesia. This inclusive interpretation not only reflects the essence of Pancasila as the guiding philosophy of the Indonesian state but also underscores the importance of fostering harmony and unity among diverse religious communities within the nation.

In further understanding the complexities surrounding the perception of Pancasila and its relationship with religion, insights from previous research are invaluable. The persistence of the belief among a small percentage of students that Pancasila contradicts religion reflects a nuanced challenge within Indonesian society (Muhaemin et al., 2023). Various factors may influence this perception, including differing interpretations of religious teachings and historical contexts. Additionally, Daheri et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of interpreting the principles of Pancasila as providing an inclusive foundation and respecting the diversity of religions and beliefs in Indonesia. Their research underscores the significance of fostering harmony and unity among diverse religious communities within the nation (Hutabarat, 2023).



In the second indicator, 35.9% of students agreed that Indonesia would become a caliphate state by implementing Islamic ideology and Sharia as its legal basis. This opinion will give rise to deep debate and has become a sensitive topic in Indonesia, which has a diversity of religions, beliefs, and cultures. As the country's primary ideology, Pancasila is an inclusive philosophical foundation that recognizes the plurality of diversity in Indonesia, placing the principle of respecting all religions and beliefs (Musyahid & Kolis, 2023). Thus, the idea of a caliphate state that focuses on one particular religion is not in line with the principles of Pancasila (Arifinsyah et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the debate surrounding a caliphate state reflects Indonesia's political and social dynamics. The country has undergone numerous political and ideological shifts throughout its history, and the idea of a caliphate state may be one of the many currents of thought emerging within society (Kustati et al., 2023). However, it is essential to remember that every political ideology or idea must be tested within democratic values and diversity, which Pancasila highly cherishes (Wisnarni, 2023).

### **Opportunities and Challenges in the Implementation of Religious Moderation**

The opportunities for implementing religious moderation in higher education are expanding with the development of government policies supporting the reinforcement of diversity and tolerance values. One of the main opportunities is regulatory support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which encourages universities to integrate religious moderation into curricula and academic activities (Daheri et al., 2023). This study found that such policies have provided universities with the space to design more inclusive educational strategies. Additionally, technological advancements and digital media offer significant opportunities for disseminating moderation values through online platforms, such as virtual seminars, interfaith discussions, and social campaigns.

However, in practice, the implementation of religious moderation also faces complex challenges. One of these is resistance from certain groups that continue to uphold exclusive interpretations of religion and are less receptive

to diversity. This study found that some students still perceive religious moderation as a compromise to their religious beliefs. This challenge highlights the need for a deeper educational approach to instill an understanding that religious moderation is not a weakening of faith but rather a strategy for fostering social harmony in a pluralistic society.

Another challenge in implementing religious moderation is the uneven understanding among lecturers and educators. Not all lecturers have an adequate understanding of the concept of religious moderation, leading to gaps in the delivery of material across different study programs (Hanafi et al., 2023). Therefore, training programs for lecturers and educators are essential to enable them to teach religious moderation values more effectively. By addressing these challenges, higher education institutions can play a more significant role in creating an inclusive and harmonious academic environment.

Additionally, the rejection of the concept of the caliphate state can also be seen as an effort to uphold the cultural and religious diversity that forms the core identity of Indonesia (Chomsah, 2022; Kurnia PS et al., 2018; Sutomo & Budihardjo, 2021). Through this rejection, society strives to ensure that every individual or group feels recognized and respected within a pluralistic framework. Thus, the debate on the caliphate state becomes a political issue and reflects a struggle for inclusivity, diversity, and national identity values.

Previous studies have indicated that most Indonesian society tends to support the principles of democracy and pluralism in their governance system. Surveys conducted by independent research institutions have also found that most Indonesians perceive religious freedom and cultural diversity as significant values (Wahyudin et al., 2019). These findings affirm that, while there may be a minority voice supporting the idea of a caliphate state, the majority of Indonesian society chooses to uphold the democratic and inclusive framework advocated by Pancasila.

Moreover, research has shown that religious and cultural diversity has significantly strengthened Indonesia's national identity (Mulyana, 2023). The inclusive approach adopted by Pancasila has successfully maintained stability

and harmony among diverse religious and cultural groups in Indonesia. Therefore, discussions about the caliphate state should not only be considered from a political standpoint but also as part of Indonesia's journey to building an inclusive society based on diversity (Lewis, 2023).

The third indicator is that 73.6% of students agree that the Indonesian leader has to be a Muslim. As the majority of Muslims, of course, students want the nation's leaders to be figures in bridging Islamic religious laws. Even though the Indonesian constitution is based on the principle of the rule of law, the arguments regarding a candidate's beliefs for a leader or president are not determined by their religion (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021). The election of Presidents and leaders in Indonesia must be based on qualifications, political support, and applicable constitutional requirements (Hanipudin et al., 2023). The majority of Indonesia's population adheres to Islam, but Indonesia implements the concept of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia which guarantees freedom of religion to all its citizens (Evirianti, 2017; Manshur & Husni, 2020). It is reflected in the Indonesian constitution, which upholds the values of tolerance and diversity in religious life. Thus, religious principles are not an absolute requirement to occupy the highest leadership position in the country.

It is important to remember that in a democratic country like Indonesia, principles of equality and justice must serve as the foundation for selecting leaders (Marzuki et al., 2020). While religion can be a part of one's identity, political decisions should be based on competence, integrity, and commitment to the interests of all Indonesian people. It underscores that in selecting leaders, the emphasis is placed on leadership qualities capable of representing and serving all citizens regardless of religion or belief (Riyanto, 2023).

Thus, while the desire of students to have a Muslim leader may be reflected in the indicator, it is essential to understand that religious diversity in Indonesia must be respected and acknowledged within the context of inclusive nation-building (Pajariantanto et al., 2023). Upholding principles of democracy, the rule of law, and freedom of religion are crucial to maintaining stability, harmony, and progress in Indonesia as a pluralistic and multicultural nation (Aflahah et al., 2023).

A unique thing was obtained from the fourth indicator, 10.3% agreed that respecting the flag was an act of shirk. Respecting the Red and White flag is more related to respect for national symbols and patriotism towards the country. Indonesian citizens are encouraged to respect their country's flag, not as an object of shirk but as a symbol of the nation and nationalism (Murad & Rizki, 2022). Respecting the flag is part of the obligation of a citizen to respect the national symbol. It expresses love for the homeland, not a substitute or religious representation subject to shirk. Therefore, in this context, there is no contradiction between respecting the Red and White flag as a national symbol of Indonesia and the teachings of shirk in Islam. In fact, it can be understood as part of the responsibility of a citizen to glorify state symbols while still adhering to overall religious teachings (Arif, 2021).

Every religion prohibits all acts of violence, but regrettably, there are still 5.8% of students who think that suicide bombing is martyrdom; this thinking is in complete contradiction to Islamic teachings that the concept of martyrdom usually refers to someone who falls or dies while defending a religion, country or people naturally and legally, such as in an internationally recognized war (Rofi & Setiawan, 2023). As a country with diverse religions, cultures, and races, Indonesia should uphold the values of mutual respect in everyday life. However, there is a small portion of students, 6.9%, who consider destroying illegal places of worship of other religions to be a typical attitude, even though in our democracy, In the context of a healthy democracy, every individual has the right to practice religion or their beliefs without fear of repression or discrimination. The act of destroying places of worship without a fair legal process and a firm basis violates human rights, the right to worship, as well as the principles of diversity, which are the basis for a democratic society and are part of the principles of religious moderation (Malik et al., 2021).

In the last indicator, 4.3% of students prohibited Muslim regional leaders from wishing other religions a happy holiday, even though it is highly recommended in the context of muamalah with the aim of inter-religious harmony. Saying happy holidays to other religions is an action that embraces

diversity and shows mutual respect between religious communities (Pajariantanto et al., 2022). It helps strengthen relationships between individuals and brings peace and tolerance to society. Wishing each other a happy holiday in a broader context shows an inclusive and tolerant attitude that aligns with positive human and social values (Tolchah et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the prohibition against Muslim regional leaders from extending holiday greetings to other religions reflects a lack of understanding of the importance of interfaith dialogue and religious harmony (Arai, 2023). In a diverse society like Indonesia, fostering harmonious relations between religions is crucial for strengthening social cohesion and creating a peaceful and inclusive environment. Simple actions such as wishing each other happy holidays among religious communities are small yet significant steps in building trust and cross-religious friendships.

Moreover, such restrictions may limit leaders' ability to serve as positive agents of change in promoting tolerance and interfaith harmony at the local level. Leaders who can enhance interfaith cooperation and broaden understanding among religious communities will help drive the realization of a more inclusive and harmonious society (Munawir K. et al., 2023). In an increasingly interconnected globalized context, the ability to communicate and interact with various cultures and religions is becoming an increasingly important skill for future leaders (Azmi & Daulay, 2022).

Lastly, it is essential for education and community development to reinforce inclusive and tolerant values in dealing with religious and cultural differences. Through education that promotes understanding and appreciation of diversity and policies supporting interfaith dialogue, communities can better understand and respect differing perspectives and beliefs. It will lead Indonesia towards a brighter future and help it realize a peaceful, prosperous, and just society for all citizens regardless of their religious background or beliefs.

Student Perceptions regarding religious moderation, which includes issues of ideology, religion, and national values, can produce some significant findings that provide in-depth insight into views of religious moderation.

Further analysis is needed to understand the context and factors that influence the dynamics of student opinions regarding this issues. The implications involve educational and dialogue efforts to strengthen attitudes of tolerance, inclusiveness, and understanding of diversity in society.

The findings of this research shed light on the perspectives and attitudes of university students toward the concept of religious moderation within the Indonesian university environment. The statistical data provided a comprehensive overview of how students interpret and respond to complex religious issues. Most students demonstrate a deep understanding of the importance of maintaining harmony between religious values and inclusive national principles, as reflected in their support for aligning Pancasila and religion.

However, there are variations in views regarding specific sensitive issues, such as the idea of establishing a caliphate or the requirement for Indonesian leaders to be Muslim. While most express disapproval of these ideas, a portion also supports them. It indicates differing opinions and deep understandings of Indonesia's relationship between religion and politics.

Furthermore, the research also highlights students' inclusive and tolerant attitudes towards religious diversity. The majority reject extreme views, such as considering honoring national symbols as a form of idolism or viewing suicide bombers as martyrs. It reflects the importance of promoting interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and appreciation of differences as part of religious moderation.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of religion and diversity in Indonesian society. With a deeper understanding of student perspectives and attitudes, collaborative efforts can be made to build a more inclusive, harmonious, and just society for all citizens, regardless of their religious backgrounds or beliefs.

The implications of this research are crucial to consider in developing policies and programs to promote religious moderation and interfaith harmony in Indonesia. Firstly, the government and educational institutions need to continue strengthening their understanding of Pancasila as the

ideological foundation of the state that accommodates religious diversity. It can be achieved through educational programs that introduce Pancasila principles in depth and encourage interfaith dialogue and collaboration within university settings.

Secondly, the findings emphasize the need to raise awareness of the importance of tolerance and inclusivity in maintaining social and political stability in Indonesia. The government and civil society organizations can collaborate to develop programs that educate the public about tolerance, facilitate interfaith dialogue, and promote cross-religious cooperation in development and humanitarian projects. It will help build a strong foundation for strengthening interfaith harmony and addressing potential religious conflicts in the future.

Lastly, there is a need to emphasize the importance of increasing religious literacy and a deep understanding of religious principles that align with humanitarian and democratic values. Inclusive and critical religious education can help prevent misconceptions or extremist understandings of religion and promote attitudes that value religious diversity and beliefs. Therefore, recommendations for developing more inclusive religious education curricula based on a deep understanding of humanitarian values will help build a more harmonious and tolerant society in the future.

Implementing inclusive religious education rooted in a comprehensive understanding of humanitarian values is essential to achieve a more harmonious and tolerant society. It involves creating curricula beyond mere knowledge of religious doctrines to include the historical, cultural, and ethical contexts in which these religions are practiced. An inclusive religious education should cultivate empathy and respect for different religious traditions, fostering a sense of global citizenship and shared human dignity.

One approach to developing such curricula is incorporating comparative religion studies highlighting common ethical teachings and humanitarian principles across different faiths. By exploring themes such as compassion, justice, and the “Golden Rule” —treating others as one wishes to be treated—students can recognize the shared values that underpin diverse

religious traditions. This approach promotes mutual respect and counters the narrative that pits religious groups against each other.

Additionally, engaging students in critical thinking and dialogue about religion can help them to analyze and challenge extremist ideologies. Encouraging critical inquiry into how religious teachings are interpreted and applied in different contexts enables students to discern between authentic religious principles and those distorted for harmful purposes. This critical engagement should be supported by a safe and open classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their views and questions about religion.

Furthermore, teacher training programs should be enhanced to prepare educators for delivering inclusive and balanced religious education. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge of various religious traditions and the pedagogical skills to handle sensitive topics and foster an inclusive classroom atmosphere. Professional development opportunities focusing on intercultural competence and conflict resolution can empower teachers to guide their students in navigating religious diversity thoughtfully and respectfully.

Incorporating community involvement in religious education can also enrich students' learning experiences. Collaboration with local religious leaders and organizations can give students authentic insights into different faith communities and their contributions to society. Such partnerships help bridge gaps between schools and communities, promoting a spirit of inclusivity and cooperation.

Ultimately, inclusive religious education aims to build a society where diversity is celebrated, and individuals are united by their commitment to humanitarian and democratic values. By fostering understanding and respect for religious diversity through thoughtful and inclusive education, we can lay the foundation for a more peaceful and tolerant world.

The findings indicate that while most students view Pancasila as compatible with religion, a small percentage still perceive a conflict between the two. This discrepancy points to a critical need for deeper engagement with the foundational principles of Pancasila in educational settings. The inclusive



framework of Pancasila, particularly its recognition of Belief in One Almighty God, is designed to accommodate Indonesia's diverse religious landscape. However, historical, cultural, and ideological factors may contribute to lingering skepticism among a minority of students. It suggests that merely emphasizing Pancasila's principles is insufficient; educational efforts must address underlying misconceptions and provide contextualized explanations that resonate with students' lived experiences.

The substantial agreement among students that Indonesia should establish a caliphate state (35.9%) raises significant concerns about the influence of certain ideological narratives within academic communities. This finding highlights the tension between democratic pluralism and the push for religious-based governance. It also reflects broader societal debates fueled by historical movements and global political currents. Addressing this issue requires an educational approach that not only reaffirms the principles of democracy and inclusivity but also critically examines the historical and sociopolitical implications of alternative governance models. Encouraging students to engage in open discussions and debates could foster critical thinking and a more balanced understanding of Indonesia's unique identity as a pluralistic nation.

The perception that national symbols, such as the Red and White flag, conflict with religious principles, though held by a minority (10.3%), reflects a potential misunderstanding of the relationship between patriotism and faith. This misalignment suggests the need for integrative education that harmonizes civic responsibilities with religious beliefs. Schools and universities must create spaces where students can explore the intersections of nationalism, religion, and culture to dismantle the false dichotomy between these elements. By doing so, educational institutions can empower students to develop a holistic perspective that values their religious convictions and commitment to national unity.

These critical insights underscore the importance of creating a more inclusive and dialogical approach to education, where complex topics are examined with sensitivity and intellectual rigor. Through such efforts,

universities can play a pivotal role in shaping a generation that embraces religious moderation and contributes to creating a harmonious and inclusive society.

## Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of religious moderation within higher education in Indonesia. The findings reveal varied attitudes toward key issues such as the compatibility of Pancasila with religion, the idea of a caliphate state, leadership based on religion, respect for national symbols, and tolerance toward interfaith interactions. While most students demonstrate a positive and inclusive understanding of religious moderation, certain misconceptions, and extremist tendencies persist among a minority. These nuances underscore the importance of fostering a deeper understanding of religious diversity and moderation through education, dialogue, and curriculum development.

The results emphasize the critical role of universities as strategic environments for cultivating religious moderation and promoting tolerance. Strengthening interfaith dialogue, integrating inclusive values into academic programs, and addressing misconceptions about religion and national identity can build a more harmonious, pluralistic, and democratic society. By prioritizing these efforts, policymakers, educators, and practitioners can support the younger generation in embracing religious moderation as a foundation for unity and social cohesion in Indonesia.[w]

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